OLIVER BRIGHT'S SEARCH

EDWARD STRATEMEYER

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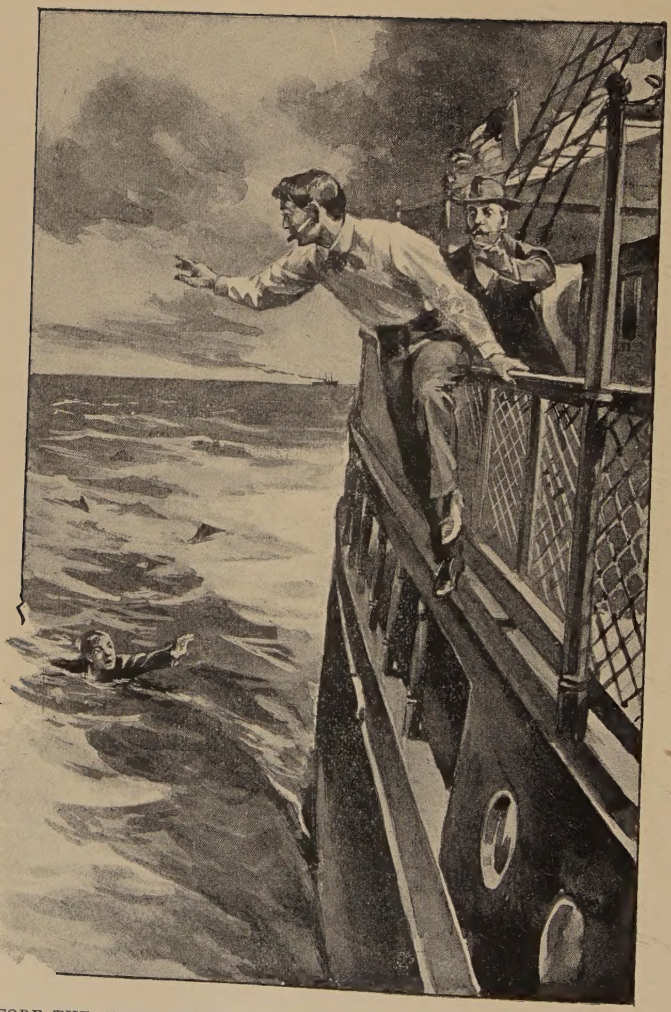

BEFORE THE OTHER COULD INTERFERE, OLIVER WAS ON THE RAIL AND OVER THE SIDE. Page 129.

OLIVER BRIGHT'S SEARCH

OR

The Mystery of a Mine

BY

EDWARD STRATEMEYER

AUTHOR OF "UNDER DEWEY AT MANILA," "A YOUNG VOLUNTEER IN CUBA"
"FIGHTING IN CUBAN WATERS," "RICHARD DARE'S VENTURE"
"TO ALASKA FOR GOLD," ETC., ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

BOSTON
LEE AND SHEPARD PUBLISHERS
1899

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Oliver Bright's Search.

Norwood Press
J. S. Cushing & Co. — Berwick & Smith
Norwood Mass. U.S.A.

PREFACE TO THE REVISED EDITION.

"Oliver Bright's Search," the second volume of the "Bound to Succeed" Series, relates the adventures of a manly American youth who goes West to locate a mine in which his invalid father owns a large interest. Oliver is just out of school, and has but little experience in travelling, yet he does not hesitate to take the trip to California, by way of the Isthmus of Panama, and thence into the interior on horseback.

Oliver is, in every respect, an up-to-date boy; one who will stand no nonsense when dealing with those who would defraud his father out of his lawful property; yet the boy's moral principles are of a high order, and he is not unmerciful when the object of his long search has been gained.

It was hoped, when the book was first issued, that the story would stand well beside "Richard Dare's Venture," which had preceded it. It has been even more successful than the other volume named, and once more the author must thank the readers and critics who have taken such an interest in what he has written.

In conclusion, the author would say a word in regard to the scenes in the mining districts of California. These were drawn very largely from the narratives of a close and dear relative who spent much time out there, going as an Argonaut of '49, and to whom the vicinity of Sutter's Mill and the Mokelumne River became as an open book, not only then but later on. To write down these descriptions was, therefore, not only a work of interest, but of love.

EDWARD STRATEMEYER.

NEWARK, N.J.,
April 1, 1899.

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OLIVER BRIGHT'S SEARCH.

CHAPTER I.

AN UNEXPECTED DISCLOSURE.

"If you please, Master Oliver, your father wishes to see you at once," said Donald, the man of all work, as he entered the summer-house where Oliver Bright sat poring over a volume of travels.

"What does he want of me?" asked the youth, as he reluctantly closed the book.

"He didn't say; but he wants you to come at once."

"Very well, Donald; where is he?"

"In the library."

Oliver rose to his feet somewhat slowly. He was in no humor just then to face his respected sire. A few words will explain why.

Oliver was afraid he was in for a lecture, and perhaps worse. He was not a boy of bad disposition, but for once the combination of circumstances had led him into serious difficulty.

Oliver was a student at the Rockvale Academy, also catcher for the local baseball nine. Two days before,

on the very afternoon that the nine was to play an important game with the club from Elmport, Oliver had been kept in by Dr. Tangus for a supposed fault of which he was not guilty. This had angered Oliver, and as his particular chum, Gus Gregory, was kept in at the same time, the two planned to "get square," as they termed it.

Their plan of action was simple and harmless enough, but it bore grievous results. Gus proposed to take the doctor's pet calf from her pasture and lead her into the schoolroom, and Oliver agreed that if this was done he would make the old cow follow.

At dead of night the two boys started to carry out their plan. But both the calf and the cow made such a noise that the doctor's whole household was aroused, and the two boys had to run for it.

In making their escape Gus Gregory had stumbled over a hothouse bed, smashing a dozen panes of glass or more, thus provoking a shot from the doctor's hired man, who imagined burglars were around.

When Oliver reached home he found he had quite a severe cut upon his left hand, obtained in his effort to help Gus out of the hotbed frame.

In the morning the wound, despite the fact that he had bathed it in arnica, appeared as bad as ever. But Oliver did not dare to ask permission to remain at

home, and so set out for the academy in anything but a cheerful mood.

Gus Gregory met him at the gate with a long-drawn face; and small wonder.

Dr. Tangus had found them out. Gus had dropped his note-book in the hotbed and the gardener had picked it up. In a terrible rage, the doctor soon after called at the Gregory home, and forced a full confession from Gus. Mr. Gregory had promised to pay his full share of the damage done, and to bring his son to account, and the doctor left saying he would call on Oliver's father later.

When Oliver entered the academy he was at once called aside by the doctor. But little was said; Dr. Tangus merely stating what he had discovered, and declaring his intention to settle the matter outside of the school.

This had happened Friday morning. It was now Saturday, and Oliver firmly believed that the hour of retribution had come. He took all the time possible to walk up the gravel path and through the broad hall, and hesitated several seconds before turning the handle of the library door.

When he entered the room he found his father seated at the desk, his forehead resting on his hand. Mr. Bright was a man well past the middle age of life, and somewhat broken down in health.

He was tall and slender, with brown hair and eyes. His manner as a general rule was gentle, and as Oliver gazed at his parent, his heart smote him for the trouble he had brought about.

"You sent for me, father," he said, as he stopped by the door.

Mr. Bright started up from the revery into which he had fallen.

"Yes, Oliver," he replied. "Come in and sit down. I want to have a talk with you."

The boy did as requested, taking a chair that stood in the bay-window at the farther end of the room. He could not help but look at his father closely. Surely he did not appear to be much provoked over what had occurred.

"Come closer, Oliver; here, take this chair by my side," went on Mr. Bright. "I do not wish any one to overhear what I have to say."

The boy took the seat indicated. Then for the first time he noticed how careworn his father appeared. There were numerous wrinkles upon Mr. Bright's brow and his eyes were sunken and troubled.

"You are nearly seventeen years old, I believe," began Mr. Bright after a moment of silence.

"I'll be seventeen next May," replied the boy, relieved at being asked such an ordinary question.

"And your term at the academy closes next month, I believe?"

"Yes, sir; three weeks from yesterday."

"And when you have finished your course there have you thought of what was to be done next?"

"Why I thought I was to go to college," said Oliver, somewhat astonished at the question. "Of course you didn't say I was to go; but all the others were going, and — "

"It was my full intention to have you go, Oliver. But circumstances will make a change necessary. I hate to disappoint you, but I am afraid it cannot be helped." And Mr. Bright turned away his face.

Oliver's heart grew cold in an instant. Give up going to college! Give it up after having anticipated it so long, after having talked it over so many times with the other boys! Surely his father intended to punish him too severely altogether.

"Oh, don't say that, father!" he cried. "I will try to do better in the future! I did not mean to do so wrong! I — I did not stop to think."

Mr. Bright straightened up and looked at his son curiously.

"What are you talking about, Oliver?" he asked. "I am not finding fault with the way you have conducted yourself at the academy. In fact, I must congratulate you on the general excellence of the reports Dr. Tangus sends in. By the last I see that you stood next to the highest in the class, and that

counts for much where there are so many bright boys. I have no doubt that the doctor is proud of you."

Oliver was completely mystified by this speech. It was evident that his father knew nothing concerning what had taken place. The boy gave an inward groan as he thought of what a change there would be when exposure came.

"Then Dr. Tangus has not been here?" he asked.

"No. What put that in your head?"

"I thought he had come to report me."

"No; I have not seen the doctor in a month, though I expect him to call soon." Oliver started. "I have had no reasons to find fault with you for the way in which you conduct yourself. The trouble in this case comes from an entirely different quarter."

Mr. Bright paused. Oliver noted that there was a slight quiver in his father's voice. Surely something quite out of the ordinary was wrong.

"You are the only one who is left to me, Oliver," Mr. Bright continued. "It was always my intention to give you the best education that money can buy, for I know the value of such, and then give you a first-class start in whatever professional pursuit you might choose to enter. But now, my poor boy" —

Mr. Bright broke off short.

"What is the matter, father?" cried Oliver. "Why cannot you do as you intended? I thought sure I

"Yes, Oliver, alas! I am ruined." Page 11.

would go to college and then, after perhaps a year or so of traveling, I would settle down and become a lawyer — that is, if you thought I was smart enough."

"That programme would have suited me exactly, Oliver. Your Uncle William was a lawyer, and you take after him a good deal. But now it cannot be thought of."

"Why?"

"Ah, it is a bitter story, my boy, and I do not see how I can tell it to you. I was very blind and foolish, trusting those that were not worthy of my confidence, and now both of us must suffer for it."

"I don't understand."

"And perhaps you never will, quite. I was never of a speculative nature; but this was apparently so easy, and so sure to turn out profitably, that I entered into it without due consideration."

"It is money-matters, then, father, that makes you say that I must change my plans; must give up thinking of going to college, and all that?" faltered Oliver.

"Yes, Oliver, alas! yes." Mr. Bright heaved a deep sigh. "I am ruined; I am not worth a dollar in the world!" he added.

CHAPTER II.

THE STORY OF THE AURORA MINE.

OLIVER BRIGHT was greatly astonished by his father's disclosure. There had been nothing said or done heretofore to indicate that Mr. Arthur Bright was on the brink of financial disaster. The two had lived in exceedingly comfortable, if not elegant, style, and the boy was granted every reasonable desire.

"You are ruined?" he repeated, with eyes wide open at the announcement.

"Yes, Oliver, completely ruined. This very roof that shelters us is no longer my own."

"And is there no hope?"

Mr. Bright shook his head.

"I have hoped, until now; all hope is useless — that is" — and the man paused.

"What, father? What is the chance?" asked the boy eagerly.

"It is hardly worth considering, Oliver, it is so small. We had better face the truth, bitter as it is."

Oliver drew a long breath. To endure poverty is no pleasant thing, especially when one has once

been rich. The boy was so completely taken aback that for a moment he did not say a word.

"I should have spoken of this before and prepared you for its coming," went on Mr. Bright; "but day after day I trusted that matters would take a better turn and all would be right. I am to blame there."

"Never mind; you did what you thought was right," responded Oliver as bravely as he could. "But I wish I had known; I would not have laid so many plans for the future. I might have got ready to go to work instead."

"I have not yet decided what I shall do when we leave this home. I have been out of active business so long that I suppose it will come hard to resume it again. Perhaps I will go back to the book business, that is, if I can find a suitable opening."

Oliver looked at his father in dismay. For a man in Mr. Bright's state of health to go back to active life after a retirement of eight years would be hard indeed.

"I wish I knew something of the book business; I'd sail right in and work for both of us," he declared with considerable vim. "But I don't know the first thing about business of any kind," he added with a sigh.

"You are bright by nature as well as by name,

Oliver," said his father with a faint smile. "I think you will stand a fair chance of making your way."

"I hope so. Any way, I intend to try. But, father, won't you tell me something of your affairs?"

"Yes, Oliver; I intend to tell you as much as you can understand. It may prove a useful lesson to you." Mr. Bright ran his hand over his forehead as if to collect his thoughts. "About a year after I sold out my interest in the Franklin Book Company and settled here, I became acquainted with Colonel Mendix. Do you remember him?"

"Oh, yes. He was a dark, Spanish gentleman, with a heavy black beard."

"You are right, saving that he was far from being a gentleman, though I did not know that at the time. This Mendix was introduced to me by James Barr, an intimate friend of mine, who was a surveyor and who had become interested in several mining schemes."

"I remember him also."

"This Mendix visited me several times, and finally unfolded to me a simple plan for making a fortune on the outlay of a comparatively small sum of money. As you say, he was of Spanish descent, his people coming from some place in South America. He had also a number of relatives among the early settlers in California, who, you know, settled there before the gold fever broke out."

"Yes, I have heard of those Spanish settlements."

"Colonel Mendix said that among these relatives were two old men who had in their possession a paper containing the full directions for reaching and locating a very valuable mine somewhere up among the mountains. These two men were too old to work the mine themselves, and they were willing to sell out their secret and rights for ten thousand dollars, to be paid when the mine was located and found to be as they represented."

"What was the mine supposed to be worth?" asked Oliver with interest.

"Colonel Mendix placed its value at not less than seventy-five thousand dollars, and said it might be worth several hundred thousand."

"It's a wonder he didn't buy the mine in himself, without saying anything about it."

"He said he had not the cash, and he did not wish to apply to any of his Spanish friends for fear they would make inquiries and buy the mine for themselves. Mendix was a very plausible talker, and before I was aware of what I was doing, I had agreed to advance the money, stipulating, however, that James Barr should be the one to locate the mine and determine its value. I had known Barr so long that I felt sure I could trust him.

"Well, the contract was drawn up and signed.

By it Mendix was to have a quarter interest in the Aurora Mine, as we had christened it, and James Barr was to have an eighth. The remainder was to be mine. I was to advance the purchasing money as well as the cash to open up the place, either to work it ourselves or place it on the market. Do you follow, Oliver?"

"Easily enough; it's as plain as day."

"As soon as this was done, Mendix and Barr set out for California. Two months later I received word that they had obtained the directions and were about setting out for the mine, which was located somewhere back of a place called Sutter's Mill.

"Four months passed. Then came a long letter from Mendix and a note from Barr. The mine had been found even better than represented, and they wished to close the bargain at once, and asked me to forward a draft for five thousand dollars additional, which they intended to use in purchasing the machinery of an abandoned mine some ten miles distant, and have it transported to the Aurora. The outlook seemed so favorable that I complied without hesitation.

"Another letter came a month later from Mendix, saying the mine had been opened, but that another five thousand dollars would be needed to put in additional machinery for draining the water and crushing the rock. This I also paid, although in order to do

it I was compelled to take a mortgage on this place for three thousand."

"Didn't you have other money?"

"Only in stocks, and those I did not care to sell as they were then low and I thought they would rise. I found that Dr. Tangus had money to loan, and so I went to him."

"Dr. Tangus!" cried Oliver, thinking of what was to come,

"Yes. He let me have the money and took a mortgage on this place. The money fell due last week, and yesterday I received a note from the doctor asking for payment."

Oliver gave a groan. Was it possible his own doings had hurried Dr. Tangus's actions?

"And you cannot pay him?"

"No. But I am ahead of my story. Time went on and I heard no more from the mine. I wrote to Mendix and to Barr, but received no reply. Then came a draft for four thousand dollars to pay for some more machinery Mendix had ordered. I paid the claim, but immediately sent word not to contract any more debts, as I would not pay them, and demanding an accounting.

"None came, and I sent an agent to San Francisco to find out how matters stood. At the end of two months I received word from this man, Bentwell,

and also from Mendix, that the mine had become flooded with water, that it could not be drained, and that in making surveys of the place James Barr had been drowned.

"This news was so disheartening I knew not what to do. I was out twenty-four thousand dollars, and had not a thing to show for it. I was on the point of starting for California myself when a friend of Mendix appeared on the scene.

"This man had been out to the mine, and knew all about it. He said the Aurora was utterly worthless, that Mendix had at last found it so, and that the man had left in disgust for South America. Private creditors had levied upon such machinery as was above ground, and that I might as well give up all hope of ever receiving a dollar out of the thing.

"This news all but prostrated me; for in the meanwhile stocks here in the East were declining rapidly. I kept up as long as I could, but now it is no use to do so longer. As I said before, every dollar is gone."

Mr. Bright turned away to hide his emotion. The story had been a hard one to tell. Oliver knew not what to say.

At this juncture there was a knock at the door, and Mrs. Hanson, the housekeeper, appeared.

"Dr. Tangus is here to see you," she said to Mr. Bright.

CHAPTER III.

MR. BRIGHT'S RESOLVE.

THE announcement that Dr. Tangus had come to see his father filled Oliver Bright with dismay. Considering the story he would have to tell, the doctor's arrival at any time would have been unpleasant for the boy, but under existing circumstances it was a thing to be dreaded. What would his father think when the whole miserable story came to light?

And yet, if it must be told, he wished that his father should first hear it from his own lips. He knew the doctor could turn the case so that it might look very black indeed.

Therefore, before Mr. Bright had time to tell the housekeeper to show the schoolmaster in, the boy leaned over and whispered, —

"I would like to speak a few words with you before the doctor comes in."

His father nodded, thinking that his son wished to continue the conversation that had just been interrupted.

"Take the doctor in the parlor, Mrs. Hanson," he said. "Say I will see him in a moment."

Mrs. Hanson at once disappeared. When the two were left alone Mr. Bright looked at Oliver inquiringly.

"There is nothing more to tell," he said; "Dr. Tangus's visit caps the climax. He, no doubt, has called for his money; and unless I get an extension of time in which to pay up, the matter will be put into the sheriff's hands, and the place will be sold."

"It is too bad," returned the boy. "But there is something else I wish to speak about." He colored up painfully. "I did not think so much of it at the time — that is, I did not think it was so wicked a deed to do. When I came in I thought Dr. Tangus had been here and told you all about it."

"About what?"

In a few words, and with a very troubled look upon his face, Oliver told his tale. Mr. Bright listened in silence.

"I know now just how bad and senseless a thing it was to do," said the boy, at the conclusion.

"I trust you do," replied his father. "Pranks of that kind to my mind show only a lack of wit. You ought to be above such things, Oliver." Mr. Bright heaved a sigh. "I am afraid this will tend to make the doctor stiff in his demands. I thought the tone of yesterday's letter was rather severe."

"I am afraid so too." Oliver bit his lip in vexa-

tion. "I wish he had punished me in school instead. It isn't fair to make you suffer for what I have done!" he cried.

"When we do wrong we are not always sure who will suffer for it. But we will say no more about it. What I have revealed will be punishment enough for you. Now I must go; it will not do to keep the doctor waiting any longer."

Mr. Bright rose and left the library. Oliver remained where he sat, his chin resting in the palm of his hand.

What a change had taken place since he had entered that room only a short hour before! He had thought himself a well-to-do boy, with every prospect of a brilliant future; now he knew he was as poor as the humblest lad in Rockvale. Instead of going to college and taking things easy for a year or so thereafter, he must roll up his sleeves and go to work. What had brought this great change about?

Carefully he reviewed all the facts which his father had related. Not an incident was forgotten. He wished he had the letters from California to read over; they might contain some particulars his father had forgotten to mention.

"I would like to see that Aurora mine, and satisfy myself that everything is as this Colonel Mendix claimed," he thought. "He was a thorough sharper

in my opinion; and if I was father I would not take his word for the matter."

His thoughts were interrupted by the entrance of Mr. Bright, accompanied by Dr. Tangus, a stout and highly important looking individual.

Oliver rose and greeted the visitor, offering him a chair at the same time, his face flushing the while. Dr. Tangus looked at him sharply.

"Well, young man, your father tells me you have told him of your mischief-making," began the schoolmaster.

"Yes, doctor; and I am quite sorry for what I have done."

"Humph! boys generally are after they are found out," sniffed the learned gentleman. "However, now that you have told your father, I intend to leave the case in his hands. You are generally a pretty good boy, and I am sorry you have broken your record."

Oliver did not reply, and the doctor turned to Mr. Bright.

"Then you will grant me an extension of time?" asked the latter anxiously.

"I will give you two months, Mr. Bright," was the somewhat slow response; "but more than that I cannot do. If at the end of that time you cannot pay I will foreclose."

"Very well, we will so understand it," said Oliver's father; "and I thank you for the accommodation," he added politely. "Here are the papers."

The document in the matter was duly drawn up and signed. Then Dr. Tangus took his leave.

"I trust you are able to meet the claim when due," said he on departing.

"I shall try my best," responded Mr. Bright.

When the door was closed he sank down in his chair.

"We have two months' grace, Oliver. If I cannot pay at the end of that time, out we go."

"Two months is quite a while," replied the boy as bravely as he could. "A good deal may happen in that time. Any way, it will give us both a chance to look around for situations. But tell me, isn't this place worth more than the mortgage he holds?"

"Yes; but it wouldn't bring it at a forced sale. I am quite sure we will be left without anything but our personal effects. Of course they amount to considerable; but oh, how I hate to part with any of them!"

"I hope it won't become necessary, father. But will you let me see those letters that Colonel Mendix wrote you? I have an idea he didn't tell you the truth about that mine."

Mr. Bright started.

"The same thought has occurred to me," he said.

"I often wished I had gone to the place and seen for myself."

"Why didn't you?"

"I was ill, and too much interested in bonds here. The bonds that I carried were of the par value of one hundred thousand dollars, four times what the mine cost. I gave my attention to the larger deal. Besides, there was another reason; I did not know exactly where the mine was located nor how to reach it."

"You did not?"

"No. Mendix had all the papers; and he kept them, or destroyed them, I do not know which."

Then for all you know the mine may be valuable and in running order to-day," went on Oliver excitedly.

"I doubt it, Oliver; and yet" —

"If Mendix was a rascal, his saying that the mine was flooded might only be a ruse to get you to abandon your claim to it."

"That is so. To tell the truth, more than once, since I lost my other property, I have thought of going out and making an examination."

"Then why don't you go? It will do no harm, and may save you from ruin."

Mr. Bright started up.

"I will go, Oliver," he cried.

CHAPTER IV.

AN ACCIDENT.

His sudden resolve seemed to liven up Mr. Bright considerably. He rubbed his hands and strode up and down the room.

"Yes; I will go," he repeated. "As you say, it can do no harm, and may save us from ruin."

"May I go too?" asked Oliver eagerly.

Mr. Bright thought in silence for a moment.

"I would like to have you with me," he said; "but I think you had better remain behind. One of us ought to stay here, and, besides, the expense of the journey will be considerable."

"I am sorry," said the boy; "I would like to go first-rate."

"Come, we will go over what letters and papers I have together. Perhaps you will see something in them that I have overlooked," said Mr. Bright.

Opening one of the locked drawers of the desk, Mr. Bright brought forth the various communications he had received from Colonel Mendix and James Barr. Both father and son read them over carefully.

"It is my impression that this Mendix did not

wish you to visit the Aurora mine," said Oliver. "If you will notice, throughout the letters he speaks of the hard road to travel to get there, and the unhealthiness of the climate, and all that. He knew you were not strong, and he hoped that would deter you from venturing."

"Perhaps you are right, Oliver. I did not think of that before."

"Are you sure this Mendix has gone to South America?"

"I was; but your questions fill me with doubt. I begin to think that perhaps I have been blind all this time. I think — my! my! What is the matter with Jerry?"

Oliver's gaze followed that of his father out of the window. There, on the smooth lawn, a spirited horse was acting in an exceedingly strange manner, throwing his head viciously from side to side.

"Donald has been whipping him again," said Oliver. "He ought to know better."

Mr. Bright did not reply. Springing from his chair, he hurried from the library, his son following.

In his day Mr. Bright had been quite a horseman, and Oliver, too, liked to ride. Both hated to see an animal abused, and both were excited over the present sight.

"Whoa! Jerry! whoa!" cried Mr. Bright, running up to the horse.

He caught the animal by the halter, which had been broken off rather short, and attempted to soothe him. But Jerry's blood was up, and before Mr. Bright was aware he was thrown in the air and came down heavily against the grape arbor.

"Oh!" He gave a deep groan of pain. "Catch him, Oliver; but be careful about it."

The boy was already advancing. He caught the halter, and then vaulted upon Jerry's back.

For a moment there was a fierce struggle, but Oliver kept his seat, and feeling himself mastered, the horse subsided. Then the boy jumped to the ground and turned him over to the man of all work.

"Take him back to the stable, Donald," he said; "and mind you, he is to be whipped no more."

"I only struck him once" — began the man.

"That was once too often. Jerry is too nervous to be handled in that manner."

Oliver saw the horse led away, and then turned his attention to his father. To his surprise Mr. Bright had fainted.

Running to the well, the boy procured some cold water, which he sprinkled in his father's face. It had the effect of reviving him almost immediately.

"Are you hurt?" asked Oliver in deep anxiety.

"I — I am afraid I am. My chest hurts, and I cannot use my right leg."

"I'll call Dr. Kitchell," replied Oliver.

Fortunately the physician lived directly across the road. He was at home, and in less than three minutes the boy had him over.

"Humph! two ribs broken, and also the right leg!" said Dr. Kitchell. "Rather a serious accident. Come, we will carry him into the house."

Donald was called, and the three succeeded in carrying the unfortunate man into the house and placing him on the lounge in the sitting-room.

Then the man of all work was dispatched to the drug-store, and the doctor went to work to set the broken limb and fix up the fractured ribs. Oliver assisted all he could, the tears standing in his eyes meanwhile.

"Never mind," said Dr. Kitchell, noticing his grief. "It will be all right. All your father wants is quietness for a couple of months. There is small danger."

Oliver felt relieved at this statement. And yet he could not help but think of the trip to California. His father would have to abandon that now, and he would hardly be well before they would be obliged to leave the house and seek a home elsewhere.

Towards evening Mr. Bright felt somewhat easier, and he and Oliver had quite a talk. He demurred strongly at being compelled to rest quietly for eight

weeks or longer, and spoke of the plans that must now be cast aside.

"Why not let me go?" said Oliver suddenly. "I am sure I can get along all right."

"No, Oliver; it would be asking too much of you."

"No, it would not. Can you get along without me?"

"I suppose I might; Mrs. Hanson is a capital nurse. But it is too big an undertaking for a boy."

"You forget, father, that I am nearly seventeen years old."

"No, I do not; nor do I forget that you are smart for your age. But still I would hate to send you on a journey that might prove full of danger. If their accounts be true, the road is a perilous one, and the mining districts are full of rough characters."

"After I left San Francisco I could go well armed. I don't think it would be so dangerous. A good class of settlers are pouring into the place, and they would surely not molest me. You must remember that things are not as they were at the close of the war."

"What you say is true, Oliver; but I would hate to send you into the midst of danger, however slight. If you were only going to San Francisco it would

be different. But to go away up in the mountains, and utterly alone" —

Mr. Bright did not finish, a violent twitch of pain stopping him short. Seeing that his father could not stand conversing, Oliver withdrew.

He ascended to his own room, and, taking a chair by the window, sat down to think. For fully half an hour he did not move. Then he went below and made his way to the kitchen, where Mrs. Hanson was preparing some broth for the sick man.

"Mrs. Hanson," he said, calling her aside, "father was planning to go on a journey, and now that he can't go, I've been thinking of going for him without letting him know — that is, for several days. Do you think you could get along without me while I am gone?"

"Why, bless you, Oliver, yes! I've been a nurse these ten years before I was a housekeeper. It will be no trouble whatever."

"And you will not let him know that I have gone — that is, for a few days? It might only worry him."

"If you wish it."

"Then it's settled."

"When will you go?"

"Monday morning early."

"Very well; I won't say a word. It's business, I suppose?"

"Yes; father's business; something that must be attended to."

All that evening Oliver was busy with his preparations. There was a big valise to pack, and numerous other things to do. At ten o'clock, when the others had retired, he stole down to the library, and seating himself at the table, took complete copies of all the letters and papers relating to the Aurora mine and Colonel Mendix's peculiar method of transacting business.

"Now I am ready to start," he said to himself, as he arose. "When I arrive in New York I will either sell or pawn my gold watch and my diamond pin, and then — ho, for the Aurora mine!"

CHAPTER V

LEAVING HOME.

On the following morning Oliver found his father somewhat recovered from the rude shock he had received. Of course the man was unable to move from the couch upon which he rested, but he was able to sit up and converse without, apparently, more than an occasional dull pain.

Mr. Bright was, however, much worried over the disarrangement of his plans, sighing out continually his disappointment at not being able to leave on a tour of discovery. To all this Oliver made no reply, saving to urge his parent not to worry, as all would yet turn out right.

During the day, the boy managed, by skillful questioning, to gain all the additional information that was to be had. In the afternoon he attended Sunday-school, the last time, he thought, for many weeks and perhaps months to come.

In the class with Oliver was Gus Gregory, his chum, a short and exceedingly stout youth, with a freckled but not unpleasant face. At the close of the service he and Oliver left together.

"Well, how did you make out over our fun at the doctor's?" was Gus's first question.

Oliver told him.

"My, but you got off easier than I did!" exclaimed the stout youth. "Didn't pop give it to me though! I haven't been able to sit down with any kind of comfort since."

Oliver did not reply. He was silent for a moment, and then laid his hand on his chum's shoulder.

"Say, Gus," he said, "will you keep a secret if I tell it to you?"

"Why, of course, Olly," was the prompt reply. "Did I ever let out anything I shouldn't?"

"Well, then, I'm going away."

"Going away? Where?"

"To California."

"Phew! you don't mean it!"

"Yes, I do. I'm going to start to-morrow morning first thing. I thought I'd tell you and say good-by."

"Does your father know?"

"No. Only Mrs. Hanson, and now you."

"What are you going for? just to run away? I thought you said your father didn't touch you for the trouble we got into."

"Neither did he. I'm going on business. Come, let us sit under that tree, and I'll tell you all about it."

And seated under a stately elm that grew by the roadside, Oliver related all there was in his mind.

Gus Gregory was deeply interested.

"I hope you'll succeed," he said. "My, how I wish I was going along! Nothing would suit me better."

"And nothing would suit me better than to have you," replied Oliver; "but that can't be thought of."

"Which way are you going?"

"By the way of Panama."

"It will cost quite a bit."

"Something less than a hundred dollars."

"That is quite a sum, but not so much as I thought. Have you got your ticket yet?"

"No; I intend to get that in New York to-morrow. The steamer sails for Aspinwall on Wednesday."

The two boys talked the matter over for some time. Gus was intensely interested.

"Well, I hope you'll meet with success," he said on parting. "I think it is a big undertaking for a boy, but I wish it was I instead of you."

The remainder of the Sunday passed quickly. In the evening Oliver spent another pleasant hour with his father.

When the time came for parting, the boy could hardly keep back the tears. Who knew how long it would be before he should see his father again? He was almost tempted to tell all, but the fear of being told to give up the project kept back the words.

Oliver slept but little that night, and he was up at early dawn. Making a hasty toilet, he took up his valise and stole down-stairs. Mrs. Hanson had anticipated him, and a warm breakfast stood ready to which he did but scant justice.

Half an hour later he was off, the housekeeper wishing him Godspeed. The railroad station was half a mile distant; but it took the boy scarcely any time to cover that distance, so fearful was he of being discovered and told to return.

Rockvale was a town of considerable size, situated some forty miles from the metropolis. There were over a dozen trains daily to Jersey City, the first at half-past six in the morning. This was the one Oliver had calculated on taking, and buying a ticket, he waited a few moments, and then, as the train came rolling in, got aboard.

There was a sudden jerk, and the train started and rolled out away from the station. Oliver Bright was off on his strange quest at last.

He felt queer as he settled back in his seat which he occupied alone. What would the outcome of his trip be? Would he succeed or fail?

The run to Jersey City was an uneventful one. Oliver had taken it a great number of times, so it was no novelty, and he occupied the time in studying a guide-book he had purchased at the news-stand.

When they arrived at the ferry he followed the stream of people on to the boat, and off again at the other side.

"New York!" he thought to himself as he passed up Liberty Street. "Now to sell or pawn the watch and the pin, and then I will go to the steamship ticket-office and engage a berth."

Before leaving home, the boy had cut from the metropolitan paper Mr. Bright was in the habit of taking the names and addresses of several pawnbrokers, and toward one of these Oliver now bent his steps.

He much preferred pawning the articles to selling them, as both the watch and the diamond scarf-pin were gifts from his father, and he wanted the chance to recover them.

Entering the establishment, he drew out the gold watch, and passing it over to the clerk, asked how much would be allowed upon it.

"Your own?" was the first question.

"Yes, sir; a birthday gift."

The clerk sent the watch to the back part of the store for examination.

"Fifty dollars," he said upon his return.

"Fifty dollars!" exclaimed Oliver, in some dismay. "I thought I could get more! The watch cost over a hundred."

"That is all we can allow."

"I cannot let it go for that;" and Oliver slipped the timepiece in his pocket.

The clerk paid another visit to the office.

"We will make that sixty dollars," he said, coming back. "You will not get more anywhere."

"I shall try," replied Oliver.

Another establishment was close at hand. But here the proprietor would not go above fifty dollars; so Oliver went back to the first place.

"I guess I'll take that sixty dollars," he said.

"Told you you couldn't get any more," returned the clerk coolly, as he made out the ticket and handed over the money.

"And now how much will you allow me for this pin?" asked Oliver, as he drew it from his wallet. "It is a pure diamond."

"Is this also a gift?"

"Yes, sir."

The clerk took it back to the private office. When he returned he told Oliver to go back, as the proprietor would like to see him.

Oliver did so, and found himself face to face with a thin, sharp nosed individual.

"Where did you get that pin?" was the man's question.

"My father gave it to me on Christmas, two years ago."

"Rather a fine Christmas gift."

"It was, sir."

"What is your name and address, please?" And the man prepared to write it down.

Oliver told him.

"And you are sure your father gave you this pin for Christmas?"

"Certainly I am," replied the boy, flushing. "I hope you don't think I —"

"I have nothing to say, excepting that a gold watch and a diamond pin were stolen from a boarding-house in Twenty-fourth Street last evening."

"And you think —" began Oliver, his heart rising in his throat.

"Never mind what I think, young man. Of course you may be innocent. But we must always be on our guard. I have sent my clerk around to the police precinct close by. You will please remain here until he returns."

CHAPTER VI.

AT THE STEAMSHIP OFFICE.

OLIVER was astonished and dismayed by the pawnbroker's statement. What if the police should think he was the thief? It would cause him no end of trouble, and might prove the means of compelling him to return home.

"I don't see what reasons you have for supposing the things are not mine," he began.

"I do not say they are not," was the reply. "In fact, I must say you look thoroughly honest. But, as I said before, we must be careful. We cannot afford to take in things that have been stolen and then give them up to the police."

Oliver sank down in a chair. He had but a short ten minutes to wait, but the time seemed an eternity.

He was glad to see the clerk return alone.

"It's all right," were his words. "The goods taken were recovered an hour ago."

How relieved Oliver felt! He sprang to his feet.

"Please give me the pin," he said.

The man handed it over.

"I am sorry I suspected you," he said. "But business is business."

"I suppose it is."

"I thought you wanted to pawn that pin?"

"So I do; but I shall take it elsewhere now."

And without waiting to be questioned further, Oliver hurried from the place.

About a block down the street he came to a similar establishment — indeed, the neighborhood was full of them. The proprietor took the pin and examined it closely.

"What did you give for this pin?" he asked cautiously.

"I did not buy it. My father gave it to me."

"How much do you want on it?"

Oliver hesitated. He knew he had better place the figure high.

"Seventy-five dollars."

"The pin did not cost that."

"It cost more than that."

"I will let you have forty dollars on it."

"I must have at least sixty."

Finally a compromise was effected, and Oliver received his ticket and fifty dollars.

"That makes one hundred and ten dollars for the two," he said to himself when on the street once more; "and that, added to what I have saved up from

my spending money, gives me a capital of one hundred and eighty-five dollars. By hook or by crook that amount must see me through."

From the pawnbroker's Oliver made his way to lower Broadway, where the steamship office was located. It was a busy place, and the boy was compelled to wait for his turn.

While he stood in line he meditated on what he would have to pay for a ticket. If there was any such thing as going second or third class he intended to do so. In his present straitened circumstances every dollar counted.

Suddenly a young man behind him touched him on the elbow and said, —

"Say, do you know if they take back tickets here?"

"What do you mean?" asked Oliver.

"I mean tickets to California. I have a ticket for Wednesday's steamer and I can't go because my uncle has just died, and I must take charge of part of his business."

"I don't know," said Oliver. "I am just here to buy a ticket for myself," he continued.

"Is that so? Then let me sell you mine. I paid eighty dollars for it, and I'll let you have it for sixty; that is, if they won't take it back."

"Is that the cheapest passage?"

"It is on the regular lines."

"Then I'll take it, if they won't take it back."

At the desk it was found that the ticket could be exchanged for a later boat, but could not be canceled. As the young man did not know whether, under the present condition of things, he would go to California or not, he decided to sell the ticket to Oliver; and the transfer was made on the spot.

Oliver was told that the boat would leave at ten o'clock Wednesday morning from the pier on the North River. He made a note of the time and the number of the pier, and then quitted the place.

As he did so, he ran plump into a man who was hurrying up the steps.

"I beg your pardon!" he exclaimed. "I did not mean"—

And then he stopped short. And small wonder. The man he had encountered was Colonel Mendix!

In all his life Oliver was never more astonished. He knew not what to say or do.

Colonel Mendix, having seen him but once, and that many years previous, did not recognize the boy. He stepped back, then passed Oliver, and entered the steamship office.

"Has the Rosabel sailed yet?" Oliver heard him ask.

"Yes, sir; half an hour ago."

"Ha, too bad! And the next steamer?"

"Sails Wednesday."

"Was there a passenger on the Rosabel named Whyland — Thomas Whyland?" continued the colonel anxiously.

The clerk looked over the register.

"No, sir."

"You are sure?"

"His name is not here. If he was aboard he must have sailed on some one else's ticket."

"Ah, I see. Thank you."

Colonel Mendix turned and left the building. Almost mechanically Oliver followed him.

He knew not what to make of the unexpected meeting. Had Mendix just returned from South America or had he never been to that country?

"I must find out," thought the boy. "Perhaps if I discover his business here I may be able to find out something about the Aurora mine also. I wish I had caught the name of the man he asked for."

He had the day before him, and also Tuesday, and he resolved to make good use of the time. Who knew but what he might be able to gain a deal of information before starting for the West?

Colonel Mendix walked rapidly up Broadway until he reached Trinity Church. Then he crossed over

and hurried down Wall Street. Oliver was close behind and saw him enter an office not far away.

Walking past the place, he read the sign, —

EZRA DODGE & CO.,
CALIFORNIA MINING STOCKS,

over the door. He would have liked to follow Colonel Mendix inside, but could find no pretext for so doing until he noticed a slip on the window which read, —

FREE CIRCULARS INSIDE.

Entering the place, he saw that the colonel had taken a seat within the office railing and was in earnest conversation with an elderly gentleman, presumably Mr. Dodge.

Oliver stepped up to a clerk in charge.

"Will you kindly give me a circular of stocks?" he asked.

"Certainly," was the reply. "Think of investing?"

"I wish to see what you have."

"Offer you some fine inducements," said the clerk, handing over a folded paper.

Oliver opened the circular, and pretended to look it over.

"Now, Dodge, about this Aurora mine," he heard Colonel Mendix say, and immediately he was all attention.

CHAPTER VII.

A CONVERSATION OF IMPORTANCE.

OLIVER BRIGHT was sure that he was going to hear something of importance, and he determined that not a word of the conversation between Colonel Mendix and Ezra Dodge should escape him. With his eyes fixed upon the circular in his hand, he kept his ears wide open for whatever might be said.

"Yes, about the Aurora mine," rejoined Ezra Dodge. "I want to know if you have a clear title to it?"

"Why, of course — that is, I and another have."

"Then that's all right. I wanted to know what I was loaning money on."

"Didn't I give enough other security?" asked the colonel, with a slight sneer in his tones.

"Certainly. If you hadn't I wouldn't have loaned you a dollar. Why, I don't even know where your mine is located, excepting that it is somewhere on the Mokelumne River."

"Well, whether you know it or not, the mine is there, and that is enough for me."

"Does it pay?"

"Perhaps it does."

"Are you working it?"

"Perhaps I am."

"Oh, pshaw! if you don't want to say anything about it, tell me so," cried Ezra Dodge, in evident disgust.

"Well, I don't. What I want to know is, where can that machinery be bought?"

"Right in San Francisco."

"You are sure?"

"Positive. If you don't care to believe me, buy it in New York and have it shipped out."

"Come, Dodge, don't get mad. If I want to keep the location of my mine to myself, it ought to be all right. I intend"—

Oliver did not hear any more of the conversation. The clerk in the establishment approached him, and talked stocks so persistently that the boy was glad to escape from the office.

He had, however, overheard several important facts. The mine was located on the Mokelumne River; Mendix did not care to speak of its value, but was evidently investing considerable money in buying machinery, which would tend to show that the claim was worth a good deal.

"How fortunate that I met the man!" thought Oliver. "I wouldn't have missed this chance for a

hundred dollars! And to tell father that he was in South America while he has been in California all the while! On the Mokelumne River. That ought not to be so hard to locate."

Oliver did not stop to consider that the spot mentioned was many miles in extent, and in a very wild and mountainous region. His mind was filled only with the desire to reach the place, and view with his own eyes his father's property.

Walking to the opposite side of the street, he stood in the shadow of a doorway and waited for Colonel Mendix to appear. Five minutes passed, and then the man came from Ezra Dodge's office, walked up Wall Street, and turned down into Broad.

Oliver followed him as best he could, but suddenly Mendix turned another corner, and before the boy could reach the spot the man had disappeared.

In vain Oliver hunted up and down and in the several side streets; Colonel Mendix was nowhere to be seen, and after half an hour's search Oliver gave up the task.

It was now half-past twelve, and walking about had made Oliver hungry. He moved along until he came to a restaurant, and entering, ordered dinner.

While at the table he was astonished at the bustle and confusion around him. It was true he had been to the metropolis many times, but on every suc-

ceeding occasion the city seemed to be more busy, more full of life.

Having eaten his meal, and settled the amount of the check at the desk, Oliver sauntered out upon the street once more. He had a day and a half before him, and hardly knew what to do. He walked up Nassau Street to Park Row, and then turning, drifted with the tide of humanity down Broadway. The knowledge that he was carrying so much cash about worried him, but each time he felt for it he found that his money was still safe in the inside pocket of his vest.

At length Oliver reached the Battery, and sat down on one of the benches that line the promenades. His long walk in the afternoon sun had tired him, and his head was beginning to ache.

The sights around him interested him not a little. Directly opposite to him was a poor women with a sick baby, the little thing fairly gasping for breath. To his right sat a shabby workman, or he might have been a tramp, half asleep, and beside him a tall, gaunt, almost starved looking boy, certainly not much older than himself.

Upon another bench three emigrant Germans were holding an animated conversation in their own tongue, though Oliver occasionally heard the names Chicago and Milwaukee mentioned.

The sick baby interested the boy most of all. His heart ached to see the little one in such misery, and when he saw the mother wipe the tears from her eyes, he hastily rose and walked over to her.

"You seem in distress," he said kindly. "Can I do anything for you?"

She looked up into his honest, open face.

"My baby is so sick!" she cried. "I would not care if it was myself — but baby" — and she broke down completely.

"You ought to go to a doctor," he went on.

"Alas! I have no money!" she replied. "I spent the last fifty cents I had yesterday."

Oliver's hand went down into his pocket on the instant. He could ill spare the money, but he would have done anything rather than refuse the woman assistance.

"Here is a dollar for you," he said, holding out that amount. "I wish I could make it more; but that will help you some."

For an instant the woman stared at him. Then she snatched the silver coin from his hand.

"Oh, thank you, thank you!" she cried; "I did not expect it. You are too kind."

"I would advise you to get medicine for the baby at once."

"I will, sir; I know something that I think will

just cure my poor Ellie. Oh, thank you, sir, and God bless you!"

And with tears of joy streaming down her face the woman hurried away.

A warm feeling surged through Oliver's heart as he slowly followed, the feeling that always comes when one has done a noble action.

"Poor woman, poor baby," he murmured to himself. "I hope she gets the medicine and that it cures her Ellie. What a dear baby it was!"

He had hardly gone a dozen steps before he felt a hand upon his shoulder. It was the gaunt-looking boy.

"Will you please help me a little?" he asked pleadingly. "I have been out of work for three weeks and can't get anything to do anywhere."

"You are telling the truth?" asked Oliver sharply, to make sure that he was not being deceived.

"Yes, sir. I worked in Haddan's piano action factory that burnt down."

"And you cannot get work anywhere?"

"No, sir. Oh, you don't know how hard I have tried! Every morning I answer the advertisements in the papers, but there are always a hundred men for one place."

By the way the boy spoke Oliver knew that he told the truth. He hesitated for a moment, and then handed out another dollar.

"There," he said. "I cannot afford that very well, but I hate to see any one in want. I hope by the time that is gone you will find work. Are you alone in the world?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then, if you cannot get work here, I advise you to strike out for some other place."

"Thank you; I won't stay in New York much longer."

Oliver did not reply, and the two separated.

"Cannot find work anywhere," mused the boy; "it must be hard indeed. What will father and I do if the Aurora mine scheme proves a failure? I would be nearly as badly off as that poor chap. God grant it does not come to that!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A NIGHT IN NEW YORK.

FROM the Battery, Oliver made his way back to Wall Street. He was in hopes of seeing Colonel Mendix again, and for this reason passed and repassed Ezra Dodge's office several times.

But his watching was fruitless, and finally by five o'clock he gave up. By this time the financial center was almost deserted, and he saw Ezra Dodge's clerk close the office up for the day, and walk away.

Instantly he decided to follow and accost the young man, and this he did before he had formed any clear plan of action.

"Excuse me," he said; "but I think I saw you down in Mr. Dodge's office."

"You did," replied the clerk wonderingly.

"Wasn't Colonel Mendix there?"

"Yes, he was; this morning."

"Can you tell me where he is stopping?"

"At the Gilliford House."

"The Gilliford House?"

"Yes. It is on Broadway near Sixth Avenue. Did you want to see him?"

"I did. Do you suppose he is there now?"

"I don't know. He intends to start for California soon."

"So I understand. He has a mine there, I believe."

"Yes." The clerk hesitated. "I don't know much about Colonel Mendix," he continued.

"Does he live here?"

"Oh, no; he comes from Sacramento City."

"Thank you. And you think he is up at the Gilliford House?"

"He is if he hasn't left for the West yet."

"Did he speak of leaving so soon?"

"I heard him tell Mr. Dodge he might take the train for St. Louis to-day."

The clerk nodded and then boarded a Broadway car. Oliver stood on the pavement in wonder.

"Might take the train for St. Louis to-day!" he murmured; "and I thought all the while that he intended to stay in New York for some time at least! If he has gone he will have a full day's start of me, to say nothing of the difference in the trip overland and the one by the way of the isthmus. I wish I was going by train instead."

After a moment's reflection, he resolved to go at once to the Gilliford House and see if the colonel had yet departed. If he had, then there was nothing to do but wait for the steamer on Wednesday.

On the corner was a policeman, and the officer quickly directed the boy to the proper elevated road by which he could reach the hotel mentioned. Oliver climbed the steps, procured his ticket, dropped it into the box, and a moment later was aboard the train.

Though he had been to New York a number of times, the ride in the air as it were was somewhat of a novelty to him. He sat in one of the little cross seats in the middle of the car, and thoroughly enjoyed the panorama that swept by — a panorama that was so close to him that he could note every detail.

At length Thirty-third Street was reached. Here Oliver left the train, went down the long stairs, and inquired his way to the Gilliford House.

It was not a long distance off, and in five minutes more he had entered the office.

"Is Colonel Mendix stopping here?" he asked of the clerk at the desk.

The young man looked at the register.

"Yes, sir. Wish to see him?"

Oliver hesitated for a moment.

"Yes, sir."

"I will send up your card."

"I—I— He would not know me," stammered Oliver. "Cannot you say that a young man wishes to see him?"

"Certainly. Just wait a moment. I'll send right up."

Oliver took a seat and waited. The bell-boy was gone probably five minutes.

"Colonel Mendix is out," were the clerk's words upon his return.

"Have you any idea when he will be back?" asked Oliver, somewhat disappointed, and yet relieved to think he would not have to face the man just then, when he was hardly prepared.

"No, sir."

Oliver stood for a moment in thought. He would have to remain in New York over that night and the next. Why not stay where he was?

"Can I engage a room here for to-morrow night and to-night?" he asked.

"Certainly. What kind of a room do you desire?"

"Not too high priced."

"European or American plan?" was the clerk's question, meaning thereby, as many of my readers know, if he wished it without or including meals.

"European."

"From one to three dollars."

"I will take the dollar room, sir."

"Very well. Pay in advance."

"I will pay for to-night. If I stay to-morrow I will pay that in the morning."

Oliver paid the money. He did not wish to arrange for meals at the hotel, for he did not know where he would be during the following day.

"John, show this gentleman to room 234."

"And if Colonel Mendix comes in, will you let me know?"

"I will if I see him."

Taking Oliver's valise, the porter led the way to the elevator, and they were raised to the fifth floor. Number 234 proved to be a cozy room at the rear of the hall. It was well furnished, with all conveniences, even to the pens and ink that stood on a side table.

Throwing off his coat, vest, and hat, the boy took a good wash in the marble bowl and combed his hair. This refreshed him and made his head feel better. Then locking up the room so that his baggage would be safe, he went below to a neighboring restaurant, and procured a light supper.

The sight of the pens and ink in his room made him think of writing a letter to his father, and he spent the best part of the evening doing so. He told of all that had happened, and begged his father not to be angry at his having taken the matter in hand.

The letter finished, Oliver went out and posted it. Upon returning he asked about Colonel Men-

dix, and was told the gentleman had not yet come back.

At ten o'clock Oliver retired. He was quite worn out, but the strangeness of his situation caused him to sleep but little. At seven o'clock he was dressed and at the desk.

"Colonel Mendix has sent word that his baggage be taken to the depot," said the clerk. "He took the train last night for the West."

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE STEAMER.

OLIVER BRIGHT was so taken aback by the announcement that Colonel Mendix had left New York that he hardly knew what to do. Since the day before he had calculated upon having a talk with the Spanish gentleman, and hoped to gain some important knowledge without revealing his own identity.

But now that chance was lost. The colonel had gone, and it was not likely that the two would meet this side of San Francisco.

"Took the train last night?" he repeated slowly.

"Yes, sir," replied the clerk. "Did you wish to see him very much?"

"I did indeed. What time did the train start?"

"At nine fifteen."

"Thank you."

Oliver left the desk, and walked slowly from the hotel. He was in no humor for eating his breakfast, and strolled up Broadway for a considerable distance, and up and down a number of the side streets.

"He will reach the West long before I do," he reflected. "Perhaps before I get to San Francisco he

will be at the mines. Still, he may stop over to buy that machinery he spoke of. Heigh-ho! it's a chance lost anyway."

Oliver was not naturally of a desponding disposition, and in an hour his spirits had brightened, and he was once more himself. He walked into a modest looking restaurant and procured a light breakfast, and then, in lieu of something more important to do, started out to see the sights.

The morning passed quickly enough. At noon Oliver found himself far over by the East River. He walked down the Bowery until he came to the Brooklyn Bridge, and taking a walk over this magnificent structure, procured his dinner in Brooklyn. By the time it was finished, and he had recrossed the bridge, it was nearly three o'clock.

"I'll wait until six, and then see if there are any letters for me," he said to himself, as he passed the post-office building. "Father may write to me at once, or get some one to write for him."

For a long time Oliver stood on Park Row, watching the newsboys folding their papers and disposing of them. One little mite of a chap, who was certainly not over five years of age, interested him greatly.

The boy was so small he could hardly carry his bundle of papers, and yet he seemed to drive a brisk trade, often selling a paper where some one larger

than he had met with a rebuff. Crimpsey, he heard some of the other boys call him; and finally Oliver patronized him to the extent of buying an afternoon paper for a cent.

"How's trade?" he said, as he waited for his change.

"Nuthin' extra," was the little chap's reply. "There ain't no extra news in ter day." And away he went shouting, "Extra! Last 'dition!"

"I shouldn't want to be a newsboy," thought Oliver; "yet I would rather do that than starve."

Walking over to the little park in front of the City Hall, he sat down on one of the benches and read the paper he had bought. There was but little in it to interest him, and he had soon finished. Then he threw down the sheet. In an instant a man sitting near snatched it up.

"Through?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Oliver.

"Thanks;" and immediately the man was deeply absorbed in the journal.

"Evidently he is too poor to buy a paper, and yet he is hungry for something to read," thought Oliver, and he hit it exactly.

The boy found the time hanging heavily upon his hands after this. He detested spending a day in idleness, yet it could not be helped. He walked over to

the North River, and then up West Street, and finally returned up Vesey Street to the post-office.

Here he hunted up the right window, and asked if there were any letters.

For reply one was handed out.

How eagerly Oliver took it up! It bore the Rockvale postmark. It was from home!

Stepping over to one of the windows, he tore the epistle open. It was from his father, and ran as follows: —

My dear Oliver, — As you supposed, I was greatly astonished to find that you had left home to go to California to hunt up the Aurora mine. I was inclined to think that it was a foolhardy undertaking; but upon reflection I will only say, now you have started, take care of yourself, and don't run into unnecessary danger.

I have not time to write all I desire, as I am afraid you will not receive the letter if I do not put it in the morning mail.

You say you have enough money for the present. When you reach San Francisco there will be a letter with a money order or express order for you.

I can understand what a surprise it was to meet Colonel Mendix. Have you seen him again? Be sure and keep out of trouble. I have no doubt but that he was deceiving me all the time, and cannot forgive myself for having trusted him as I did.

I suppose you did not return home Tuesday because you thought I might detain you. Well, Oliver, perhaps I might have done so, but as it is, you may go, and God be with you.

I am feeling as well as can be expected. Dr. Kitchell says I must keep quiet and all will be well. It is hard to do so, but I will try to be content.

Let me hear from you as often as possible, and do not hesi-

tate to return at any time, no matter whether you accomplish anything or not. Although if you fail it will be a bitter blow, we will manage somehow to get along.

Now I must close. With all my love I remain, your father,

ARTHUR BRIGHT.

Oliver had quite some trouble in deciphering the letter, which had been written in great haste. It is needless to say its contents pleased him greatly. A heavy load was lifted from his heart, for he had dreaded the thought of being recalled, and giving up the quest.

"I must not fail," he murmured to himself, as he put the letter in his pocket. "Father expects me to succeed, even if he doesn't say so. I am sure if I do not he will never get over the blow."

There was some truth in this, though not as much as Oliver was inclined to believe. Yet the boy walked from the post-office with a firmer determination to follow his purpose to its end and recognize no such word as fail.

He spent the evening in writing a long reply to his father, and also in sending several letters to intimate friends, including one to Gus Gregory, which was destined never to reach his chum for reasons that will soon appear.

Oliver slept more comfortably that night than he had the first. He was up, however, at seven o'clock; and after getting breakfast and settling his bill made

his way down to the steamer which was to afford him passage to Aspinwall.

Here he found all bustle and confusion. Passengers and the last of the cargo, as well as the mails, were arriving all at the same time. He sought out his stateroom and stowed away his valise, and then went on deck to view the scene.

He wondered who his room-mate was to be; but though he asked several he was unable to find out, and no one appeared.

"Maybe I will have the room all to myself," he thought; "that will be much nicer."

But the stream of people that were coming aboard seemed to indicate otherwise. What a motley crowd it was! Americans, Spaniards, Englishmen, several Chinamen, and half a dozen blacks.

Surely time would not hang heavily among such people. Oliver was already interested in the manners and speeches to be seen and heard around him.

At length the time for sailing came; and lashed fast to an energetic little steam-tug, the steamer swung off from the pier and moved slowly down the stream.

There was a crowd left behind that waved a parting adieu, cheers and tears well mixed. On board some were laughing, some crying.

Oliver felt mighty sober. There was no one to

see him off; yet he was leaving home and friends behind. When would he see all again?

Before long a tear stole down his cheek. He brushed it away hastily and took a deep breath. How he wished they were well on their way, and this parting was over! And yet he strained his eyes until the pier could be seen no longer, and eagerly watched the shore with its varied shipping.

"No use in talking, there is nothing like home," he murmured to himself; "if it wasn't for what I hope to accomplish, you wouldn't catch me leaving it."

Suddenly a snatch of song reached his ears, —

"The dearest spot on earth to me is home, sweet home."

"Paine spoke the truth when he wrote that," said Oliver to a man standing near.

"You're right, Oliver," added a voice from behind, and turning, the boy was dumfounded to see Gus Gregory standing close at hand.

CHAPTER X.

THE STORM OFF CAPE HATTERAS.

For the moment Oliver could not believe his eyesight. He stared at his chum without saying a word.

"Yes, it is I," said Gus Gregory finally. "Do you think it is my ghost?"

"Gus!" gasped Oliver. "Where in the world did you come from?"

"Where did you suppose? From Rockvale."

"And what — what are you doing here?"

"I'm bound for California; going to accompany you."

"You are! Why — why" — Oliver could not finish the question.

"Don't try to ask too many questions at once, and perhaps I'll answer some of them," laughed the stout boy. "In the first place, I left Rockvale yesterday morning about eleven o'clock. I came at once to New York, and after getting a good bath, so as not to look quite like a tramp, I bought a ticket for this steamer, and here I am."

"Yes, but do your folks know of all this?"

"Well, I guess not! I wouldn't be here but for the awful time I had with pop."

And Gus Gregory shook his head over the remembrance of the occurrence.

"Then you ran away?"

"I suppose you would call it that. But I didn't run; I couldn't. I walked, and mighty slow at that!"

"But what made you come away at all?"

"It was all on account of that scrape we got into over at Dr. Tangus's. On Monday night pop called me into the library, and said he had got a bill of damages from the old man. What do you suppose it was? Forty-five dollars!"

"Forty-five dollars! Phew!" ejaculated Oliver. "That was the whole damage done, I suppose."

"No; that was only my share. I can tell you father was mad, and he sailed right into me. He had been suffering from a toothache all day, and his temper was none of the best. I can tell you I caught it!"

Gus Gregory drew a deep breath and shifted his shoulders uneasily.

"First it was words and then it came to blows," he resumed. "At last I said I wished I was a thousand miles from home, and my father took me up and said I could go and never come back; and here I am."

"But he didn't mean that, Gus."

"Never mind, he said it, and I took him up. So that night I packed my grip, — had quite a job, I was in such a tremendous hurry, — and found out all about the steamer and so forth. I left home right after breakfast.

"Just as I passed out of the garden, father saw me, and called out to know where I was going. I told him a thousand miles away, as he had wished. He said I was a fool, and ordered me back. When I didn't mind, he came running after me. I started up the road, with my eye on him over my shoulder. I didn't notice a puddle in the way, and the first thing went a-sousing into it. Maybe I wasn't a sight to behold! I had on my best clothes too!"

Oliver laughed heartily. He could well imagine the scene.

"But you got away?" he asked with deep interest.

"Of course; if I hadn't I wouldn't be here. When I reached the station the train had just come in. I jumped aboard, and in a moment we were off. But what a mess I was in! I was mud from head to foot, and my face resembled that of the worst tramp you ever saw! I tried to clean myself as best I could, but nevertheless every one stared at me, and I had the whole seat to myself the entire way."

"I can see the mud yet," said Oliver.

"Humph! that isn't a hundredth part of it. As soon as I reached the city I hunted up a bath, and told the proprietor I had met with an accident, and he fixed me up. But I can tell you, Olly, I don't want any more such tumbles!"

"And where did you get your money to pay for the trip?" asked Oliver.

"Didn't I have a hundred dollars that Uncle Dick left me before he started for Australia? I had that and twenty-five dollars besides. I thought you would take this steamer, and as soon as I saw your name on the register, I engaged a berth too."

"And what do you intend to do when you reach San Francisco?"

"I don't know yet. But see here, Olly, you don't act a bit as if you cared to have me with you," added Gus in injured tones.

"I do care a good deal. But I'm sorry you ran away. What will your father and mother think of it?"

"I sent them a long letter just before we sailed, so they won't worry."

"But they will worry, Gus."

"Well, to tell the truth, I am sorry on mother's account. To be real candid, if I had stopped to think perhaps I wouldn't have come at all. But now I am here, and that is all there is to it."

Oliver shook his head. He knew well enough that once Gus had made up his mind there was no use to argue with him.

"Let us go below," continued the stout boy; "I have a surprise for you."

"What is it?"

"Never mind; come along."

So Oliver followed him down the broad steps and along the passageway, and Gus entered a stateroom.

"My stateroom!" cried Oliver. "How did you know it?"

"By the register. It is mine also. We are to be room-mates. Aren't you glad?"

Glad? Indeed Oliver was. The feeling of loneliness, so acute but a quarter of an hour before, was all gone now.

While they were below, Gus told much of what had passed in Rockvale after Oliver's departure. To be sure the boy had been gone but two days, yet that was long enough for all the other boys to wonder what had become of him.

Gus's haste in leaving was amply proven by the contents of his valise, all tumbled in one mess. There were two extra shoes, but they were not mates, and most of the clothing he had brought was just such as he did not desire.

"Humph! the next time I run away I'd better

take a week to do it in!" he grumbled. "Did you ever see such a collection? Looks as if I came out of a junk-shop."

"Never mind; I'll lend you what I have," said Oliver. "But my advice is to return home the first landing we make."

"Not much! I'm bound West ho!"

In a little while the two boys went on deck again. They were now drawing towards Sandy Hook, and the heavy swells made Gus turn a sickly green.

"I suppose it's about dinner time," said Oliver; "I feel mighty hungry."

"I don't want anything to eat," replied the stout boy, drawing his mouth tightly together.

"You don't!"

"No; not a mouthful."

"Why?"

"Never mind; I don't, that's all."

Oliver gave him a searching glance.

"Gus Gregory, you're seasick!" he cried.

"Not a bit of it; I'm only a bit dizzy," was the hopeful reply.

But he had hardly spoken the words before Gus swallowed a lump in his throat and then rushed for the side. Oliver, who felt perfectly well, could not help but laugh.

He went to dinner alone. The table was more

than three-quarters deserted — nearly every one was under the weather. When he came from the dining-saloon he found his chum in the stateroom flat on the floor.

"What! as bad as this?" he asked kindly.

"Don't say a word!" moaned Gus. "I'll never travel on the water again, never! I wish the steamer was at the bottom of the sea, and myself with it."

He continued to roll and moan for the rest of the day. Oliver tried to help him in various ways, but it was of no avail. There is nothing to do but to let seasickness run its course.

The boys never forgot that first night on shipboard. Several times Oliver's head began to swim from the motion, which towards morning grew worse. He slept but little, and was one of the first on deck.

"We are getting into the neighborhood of Cape Hatteras," said a gentleman standing near. "It is always rough here, but more than usually so now."

"Why?" asked Oliver.

"Because there is a storm coming up."

"A storm?"

"Yes; and a heavy one. Look over there at that black mass of clouds. There will be lively times on board to-day."

The gentleman spoke the truth. In less than a quarter of an hour the sky was heavily overcast, and a heavy rainstorm burst over their heads. Somewhat fearful, Oliver hurried below.

He had often heard of the fearful storms experienced off Cape Hatteras, and wondered if that which was approaching would do the steamship any serious damage.

CHAPTER XI.

MR. WHYLAND.

"My stars! what's the matter with the ship?" asked Gus, as Oliver entered the stateroom.

"We are going to have a storm," was the reply; "it's raining already."

"Then maybe we will go to the bottom," groaned Gus. "Or else we'll turn clear over, see if we don't."

He had been feeling just a trifle better, but now he was worse. From looking green he was deadly white, and he shook from head to foot.

"I wish I could do something for you," said Oliver kindly, for at least the fiftieth time. "But I don't know of a thing that will help you."

"It's a punishment for running away, I suppose. I'll never be well until we reach land again."

"Oh, nonsense! You'll feel all right as soon as this storm clears off."

Gus made no reply. Oliver remained in the stateroom for a while, and then ventured above to take another observation.

As he stepped on deck a violent gust of wind blew

a man's hat directly toward him. He made a dive for the tile and captured it.

"Hello, there! got it?" sang out a voice, and an instant later the gentleman who had told Oliver that a storm was coming rushed up.

"Yes, sir; here you are."

"Thanks. My, but this is rough, and no mistake!" The gentleman jammed the hat tightly over his head. "Just look at those waves over there!" And he pointed over to the starboard where the water appeared to be mountainous in its height.

"I trust we will get through in safety," said Oliver with a shudder. "I have no desire to go to the bottom of the sea."

"Nor I," laughed the gentleman. "Traveling alone?" he went on curiously.

"I have a schoolmate with me — that is, we met on board."

"That very stout young man?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ah, yes, I see. Rather young to be traveling alone. I am glad to meet you. My name is Thomas Whyland. I suppose we shall be thrown together quite some during the voyage."

"Are you going to San Francisco?"

"Yes."

"Then I'm glad to have met you," said Oliver

with a smile. "I do not know a soul but my chum. My name is Oliver Bright."

The two shook hands. Mr. Whyland appeared to be a pleasant gentleman, and Oliver thought they would be friends. He did not dream how well acquainted they were destined to become.

"Where is your chum now?" asked Mr. Whyland.

"In the stateroom, sick."

As Oliver spoke a tremendous wave broke over the deck, wetting both him and Mr. Whyland. A moment later one of the deck-hands came forward with word that all the passengers had been ordered below.

"That means us too," said Mr. Whyland. "Come, let us adjourn to the cabin."

It was with difficulty that they descended the companionway. When half-way down Oliver slipped, and had it not been for his friend would have rolled to the bottom.

In the cabin they found a motley crowd assembled — mostly passengers who were too frightened to retire to their staterooms. Amongst them was the head steward and two other officers, trying all they could to quiet the fears that were expressed.

"Nothing unusual, sir," said the steward to Oliver; "I've passed through a dozen of 'em."

"Excuse me; one is enough," laughed the boy;

"and you may depend upon it I will never forget the experience."

He and Mr. Whyland took a seat well forward, and began to talk over the prospects. Presently Oliver felt a hand on his arm, and turning, saw Gus standing beside him.

"Hello! what brought you out?" he exclaimed.

"I didn't want to drown alone," replied the stout boy. "We're all going to the bottom, do you know it?"

"The officers of the boat say not," returned Oliver. "They say it is quite an ordinary storm."

"I call it a most extraordinary, howling, rambunctious cyclone," said Gus. "I'm expecting the ship to turn clear over any moment."

Oliver introduced his companion to Mr. Whyland, and their mutual sympathy soon placed them on the plane of friendship. But Gus was too sick to remain long, and before a great while retired again to the stateroom, whither he was presently followed by Oliver.

"What do you think of Mr. Whyland?" asked the latter.

"Very nice man," returned Gus. "I'd like him still better if he would only order this storm to stop. Creation! it seems to me I'd give all I'm worth to be on land once more!"

"Then you don't think you would care to be a sailor, to sail the briny deep?" asked Oliver with a smile.

"Sailor!" Gus uttered the word in deep disgust.

"Yes. It's a splendid life — at least so the novelists say."

"Humph! I guess those novelists never saw the blue and black water, or they wouldn't put down any such nonsense! No, sir! this is my first and last trip on the flowing sea. As Paddy said, 'The next time I ship I'll travel be land!'"

"Which means that when you return home you'll do so overland."

"If I'm ever allowed to return home, which I very much doubt, if this confounded storm keeps up."

"Oh, it isn't so bad, Gus." Oliver mused for a moment, while Gus turned on the berth with a groan. "I wonder if Mr. Whyland is acquainted in San Francisco."

"Why?"

"If he is, he may be able to give me considerable information about the place."

"It isn't likely that he ever heard of this Colonel Mendix."

"Oh, I suppose not; but he will know about the mining exchange and all that, and that is what I must learn about. They must know something of Mendix.

He couldn't keep that mine a secret so long out there."

"Suppose you can't find out a single thing in San Francisco, what then?"

"It will be a disappointment, but I shall not give up. I will make a hunt up the river upon which it is said to be situated. Sooner or later I am bound to stumble upon a clew."

"I admire your grit, Olly. You deserve success."

"And I'll obtain it, mark my word, Gus."

During the afternoon, instead of abating, the storm grew wilder. The sky became even blacker than before, and all the lanterns were lit. The wind shrieked through the rigging and across the deck, and everything that was loose and light was carried over the rail.

Seated on the edge of the lower berth the two boys talked in a low tone. Sleep was out of the question, and, as Gus expressed it, somehow speech made them more courageous.

"We must be near Cape Hatteras," said Oliver. "If we —"

He did not finish the sentence, for at that instant a terrible shock was felt that sent both boys sprawling to the other side of the stateroom. There was a crashing and a tearing, and they heard piercing cries of alarm. What did it mean?

CHAPTER XII.

ARRIVAL AT ASPINWALL.

BOTH boys were frightened at the terrific shock they experienced while in the stateroom. Gus had the wind completely knocked out of him, and Oliver was little better off.

"What can it mean?" cried Oliver as he scrambled to his feet.

"Guess we've smashed on the rocks!" groaned the stout youth. "Told you we'd go to the bottom."

"If we have, I'm not going to stay below any longer. Come, let us go on deck."

Oliver helped Gus to regain his feet, and trembling with excitement as well as fear, they made their way to the cabin. Here nearly all the passengers were assembled, most of them in a high state of excitement.

Among the crowd was Mr. Whyland, who quickly joined the boys.

"What is it? What have we struck?" asked Oliver anxiously.

"I do not know. It was a fearful blow."

"Are we going to the bottom?"

"Hardly. These steamers are very strongly built. I'll go on deck and find out."

But at the companionway he was stopped.

"No one allowed on deck," said the man in charge of the stairs. "There is no danger, sir."

"What did we strike?"

"Struck a small freight schooner, and carried away her bow."

"Did she sink?"

"Oh, no. But we are steaming near her so as to be on the safe side."

This news was heard by every one who stood around, and its effect was to quiet the fearful ones. Many wondered if the schooner was seriously damaged, and if she would be able to continue her voyage.

It is safe to say that there was little or no sleep that night for those on board the steamer. Towards morning the storm cleared off, and the sun rose bright as ever.

"Well, I never!" declared Gus. "The scene has changed as quickly as it does in a panorama!"

Now that the dreadful rolling had ceased, he felt better, and Oliver was glad to see him indulge in a fair-sized breakfast.

The meal finished, they went on deck. The freight schooner that had been struck was nowhere to be

seen. Inquiries brought the information that she had not been seriously damaged and had gone on her way.

The two boys found the day rather monotonous. Look where they might, nothing could be seen but sky and water, the one nearly as blue as the other.

"Blue all around makes one feel blue," remarked Gus. "But I'm thankful I'm over that awful seasickness. If it had kept up much longer I believe I would have died."

"No one ever dies of seasickness," said Mr. Whyland, who had come up. "Your health will be better after this dose."

"Well, it ought to be," laughed Gus. "I've suffered enough. I ought to have some reward."

"But we do not always get what we deserve in this world," responded the gentleman, and for a moment a light shadow swept across his brow. "Sometimes both evil and good pass us by."

At dinner Oliver did full justice to what was passed to him. Gus felt decidedly strange, and it was some time before he could get into the peculiar way of eating that was prevalent. Everything that he had, seemed to be inclined to slide into his lap.

"We can't stand on much ceremony," he said. "I think this chicken leg is better in my stomach than on the floor, so here goes." And he took the extremity of the fowl between his fingers and ate it that way.

That day and the next passed slowly. Gus was of the opinion they would stop at some place before reaching Aspinwall, but in this he was mistaken. They passed close to the coast of Florida, so close in fact that the sandy shore with the tall and waving trees and bushes could be distinctly seen. On the following day they took the course between Cuba and Yucatan, passing not far from the latter on account of the tide. They were now in the Caribbean Sea, with the Bay of Honduras behind them.

"Looks very much like any other bay or gulf, I suppose," observed Gus, as he and Oliver stood by the rail watching some sea-gulls as they winged their way around the ship.

"I guess water looks very much the same in all parts of the earth," was Oliver's reply.

"Mostly," put in Mr. Whyland, who had overheard the last words; "although there are some places where it is quite different. Lake Como in Switzerland is as blue as indigo; the waters of some South American rivers are intensely green; and then there are the Red and Black Seas — so called from their general appearance."

"I should like to see them all," returned Oliver. "Some day, if I am able, I intend to become a great traveler."

"It is very pleasant," said the gentleman. "But it takes a lot of money, I can assure you."

Early on the day following, land somewhere on the isthmus was seen; and late in the afternoon they steamed into the harbor at Aspinwall, and dropped anchor. The boys were eager to go ashore, but were told that no passengers would be allowed to land until the following morning.

"Well, so much of the journey is done," said Oliver. "How I wish this was San Francisco Bay!"

"I don't know as I do," returned Gus. "Now that I've got over that nasty seasickness, I rather enjoy the trip."

"I would too, if I didn't have anything on my mind."

"Well, you ought not to let that interfere. Worry won't do any good."

In the fast approaching darkness but little could be seen. The boys were sure Aspinwall was a poorly illuminated town, so few lights could be distinguished. They went below and made all necessary preparations for leaving the steamer.

The evening passed quickly. At ten o'clock the boys turned in so as to be on hand bright and early.

And on hand they were. At ten o'clock both stepped out on the dock and walked slowly up the narrow and dirty street.

"Humph! not much of a city," said Gus. "See the funny houses all on stilts!"

"I suppose they build them that way to keep from getting flooded out when it rains," laughed Oliver; "or else the sea may occasionally drive in too far."

"I would not care to see myself living here. My, how muddy it is! I guess they haven't much of a street-cleaning department."

From one of the officers of the ship the boys learned that, in order to make connections with the steamer at Panama, they would have to take the train for that port on the following morning.

"That will give us a whole day in this place," said Oliver. "Come, let us start out on a voyage of discovery."

Gus was nothing loath, and they set out. They passed down the main street, where they discovered several fine-looking hotels, — quite in contrast with their shabby surroundings, — and then turned down another road close beside the water.

Most all of the people they met were either Spaniards, Frenchmen, or natives. But few Americans were to be seen, and this made both boys feel more strange than did all the other surroundings.

"We are in a different country, and no mistake," said Oliver. "See what queer ways the folks have! It makes me feel like a cat in a strange garret!"

Presently they drifted into quite a crowd that lined a wharf where a large boat was discharging fruit.

Anxious to see what was going on, they pressed their way to the front until a tall Spaniard with a long whip rushed out, and jabbering at all the strangers, drove them off.

"Not a very sociable fellow," grunted Gus. "By crickety! I thought he was going to fetch me one across the legs!"

It was now getting toward noon, and both boys were hungry. Oliver was for going back to the steamer for dinner, but Gus persuaded him to enter one of the strange eating-houses kept by a native.

"I want to see what kind of stuff they furnish," he explained.

"All right. Only you must order," replied Oliver.

So Gus ordered dinner as best he could. While they were waiting for it to be brought both boys felt in their pockets for money to pay for it. Neither had so much as a cent!

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. WHYLAND'S STORY.

"HAVE you any money?" gasped Gus.

"No," returned Oliver; and he added, "I have been robbed! I had nearly two dollars in change when I left the steamer."

"Then I am luckier than you, for I remember now that I left my purse in my valise. What are we to do?"

"I don't know," returned Oliver blankly. "I'll bet I was robbed down in that crowd at the wharf."

"Most likely."

"It's a good thing I didn't have more with me. I suppose I'll never see that money again."

"You're right. To get it back would probably be more bother than it is worth. Still, I would tell the captain when we get back."

"I certainly shall. In the meanwhile how are we to pay for our meal here?"

"I suppose we had better not eat it. Let us tell the waiter what has happened."

In a moment more the Frenchman who had taken their order appeared, his tray piled high with dishes.

Gus told their story, and motioned as if to go away. Evidently the man did not understand the stout youth, for his face grew dark.

"You have ordered the meal; you must pay for it," he said in French.

Of course Gus did not understand him, and only shook his head. This made the man angry, and he called the proprietor, and the two talked to both boys in a high pitch of voice. Oliver turned his pockets inside out and Gus did the same, but even this had no effect save to make the proprietor of the place grow pale with passion.

"It's no use," cried Oliver. "They think we are only trying to fool them, that we never intended to take dinner here. What in the world shall we do?"

"I don't know." Gus gave a gasp. "I wonder if they will dare to have us arrested?"

"Arrested? Oh, I trust not!" Oliver looked about him in deep perplexity; "but I cannot imagine what is best to do."

At that instant the boy's gaze was turned towards the door, and he was overjoyed to see Mr. Whyland enter. Breaking from the group, he ran up to him.

"Oh, Mr. Whyland, how glad I am that you came in!" he exclaimed. "My friend and I have got into an awful muss."

"Is that so? What is the trouble?"

As briefly as he could Oliver related the misfortune that had overtaken himself and Gus. Mr. Whyland listened attentively.

"It is too bad you have had your money stolen," he said. "There is no use in trying to recover it. It would certainly take more time and trouble than it is worth. You must be more careful in the future."

"I intend to be. But what shall I do here? The proprietor insists that I want to cheat him or else am fooling him."

"I will pay the bill. I suppose travelers often impose upon him and he has grown suspicious. I will speak to him in French."

Mr. Whyland was as good as his word. The restaurant keeper listened closely, and then began to bow and smile, and sent the waiter off for more stuff.

"I have told him that I will settle the bill and that I will have dinner with you," explained Mr. Whyland. "He says only last week a party of three Americans came in and fooled him, and he thought you belonged to the same crowd."

"They ought to have been ashamed of themselves," sniffed Gus. "Might have got us into a terrible mess."

"Yes; Americans away from home ought to be more circumspect in their actions. A few of them can give the entire nation a bad name."

The things that Mr. Whyland had ordered were not long in coming, and then the three sat down. It was a somewhat different meal from what they had been accustomed to at home, yet not enough so to make it noticeable.

"These people are very quick to remember how Americans like things served," said Mr. Whyland. "That is why you do not notice any great difference from a Broadway restaurant."

The meal finished, their friend settled the bill as he had agreed. Oliver and Gus thanked him, and the former promised to pay back their share as soon as the steamer was reached.

"There is no need to trouble yourself. It was but fifty cents — twenty-five apiece," said Mr. Whyland. "What were you young men doing? taking a look around?"

"Yes," replied Oliver; "but there doesn't seem to be much to see."

"You are right; Aspinwall is not a very attractive city — that is, by comparison with what we have left. It is almost too unhealthy to thrive."

On the way back to the steamer the three became even better acquainted than before. The gentleman asked where the two boys were bound, and stepped back in astonishment when Oliver, in a burst of confidence, told him that, while Gus was off merely for

a trip, he himself was in quest of a hidden mine in California.

"Surely, surely you are joking!" gasped Mr. Whyland.

"No, sir; I am telling the truth," affirmed Oliver. "I would not tell you at all, but you have been so kind to me."

"And may I ask where this mine is situated — in what direction?"

"It is somewhere on the Mokelumne River."

"And is it called the Aurora Mine?" continued Mr. Whyland with intense interest.

"It is!" cried Oliver. "But how did you know the name?"

"I am looking for the same mine myself."

"You!"

"Exactly. Do you know the owner of the claim?"

"My father owns the claim," replied Oliver decidedly.

"But Colonel Mendix" —

"Do you know that man?" asked Oliver quickly.

"Quite well, although I have not seen him for two years. He sold me a quarter interest in the mine for ten thousand dollars, and then he disappeared."

"My father gave him a quarter interest to open up the mine for him. That must be the interest he sold you. You say you have not seen Colonel Men-

dix for two years; I saw him in New York the day before we sailed."

"Is it possible?"

"I tried to meet him to have a talk with him; but before I could do so he took the train for the West."

Mr. Whyland was astonished over what Oliver had to say. He asked the boy to tell his story, and as Oliver could see no harm in so doing, he complied.

"From what you say we are undoubtedly on the same errand," remarked Mr. Whyland when he had finished. "You are searching for your father's share, and I am searching for the share given to Colonel Mendix, which that individual transferred to me. It is most fortunate that we met. If you have no objection we will work together."

"I shall be happy to do so, Mr. Whyland. You are a man, and a man can, as a rule do, more than a boy."

"But I take you to be a remarkably bright boy," laughed the gentleman. "I am sure we will get along famously together. I have not much to tell, excepting that I met Colonel Mendix in Boston, where he was introduced to me by James Barr, the surveyor you have mentioned. By Mr. Barr's advice I invested in the mine. I waited for a long time to hear from the two, but never did. Other business claimed my attention. But now I am free

to hunt the matter up, and I intend to do so. The amount at stake is not a large one to me; but still I wish to learn positively whether I have been swindled or not."

"The amount is a good deal to my father," said Oliver. "He has lost all of his other property, and this is his last hope."

"Then I trust that for his sake as well as for my own the mine proves of value."

"You've got to find it first," put in Gus. "Remember the old saying about counting chickens before they are hatched."

"I would say, don't count the eggs before they are found," laughed Mr. Whyland. "But we will trust for the best."

The three talked over the situation for a long time. Oliver was glad that he had run across Mr. Whyland. It would undoubtedly lighten his task to a great degree. The gentleman was experienced and rich, and that would count for a good deal in what was to come.

The remainder of the day passed quickly. In the evening they went aboard of the steamer for the last time. All slept soundly, and were up at a seasonable hour.

"What an odd little railroad!" remarked Gus, as they boarded the train in the morning. "Only a single track."

"It is only about forty-eight miles long," said Mr. Whyland, "but it cost an enormous sum of money to build."

Soon there was a tremendous jerk, and they were off on the trip across the isthmus. Oliver looked out of the window at the marshy ground, and the rank pools of stagnant water.

Suddenly they came to a sharp stop. What was up now?

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE WILDS OF THE ISTHMUS.

OLIVER calculated that they had been traveling not more than an hour when the sudden stoppage occurred. The shock was so great it threw him up against the seat in front of him, and awoke Gus from a comfortable nap.

"What's the matter?" exclaimed the stout youth in alarm.

"I don't know," was Oliver's reply. "Something wrong ahead, I suppose."

"Perhaps part of the roadbed has sunk," suggested Mr. Whyland, who sat on the other side of the aisle. "I understand such a thing frequently occurs here."

They all sat quiet for ten minutes. By this time one and another of the passengers began to get out, and finally the three joined them, and walked up to where the engine stood, blowing off steam.

Mr. Whyland's surmise proved correct. Not fifty feet distant the rails of the road were submerged in a murky pool of foul-smelling water. The length of the depression was about one hundred feet, and its greatest depth a foot and a half.

Already a gang of native laborers were at work repairing the damage. There were a dozen or more of them, but they worked so slowly that hardly any progress was made.

"Seems to me if I was overseer here I would hurry those men up," remarked Gus, after they had watched the proceedings for some time.

"They cannot hurry much," said Mr. Whyland. "The climate is against them. I doubt if you could stand the work more than an hour. Come, let us get away from that pool. It is a regular hotbed of fever."

"I wonder how long this will delay us?" said Oliver, as they walked back to the car.

"Suppose we ask the conductor?" said Gus.

After some little trouble they found the man, who was surrounded by a crowd of passengers, all eager to know what would be the result of the delay.

"We will go through as soon as possible," he replied. "The men will work hard, and I think in two hours, or three at the most, we will be able to move."

"Three hours!" exclaimed Oliver. "That is quite a time."

"Let us spend it in exploring the vicinity," suggested Gus.

Oliver was agreeable. Mr. Whyland did not care to go, but sat down to read a magazine, and the two boys started off alone.

"We won't go far," said Oliver. "I suppose they will blow the whistle before they start, so that we can get back."

In five minutes the boys were in a veritable forest. On every side could be seen tall palms, interspersed with cocoa, sycamore, and other tropical trees. Beneath their feet grew a rank vegetation, and wherever there was a bit of water, gorgeous lilies sprang up, the like of which they had never before beheld.

And the birds and monkeys overhead! Never had they seen such a sight, and it seemed they would never get done wondering over it. Every tree was full, and the air resounded with sweet song and senseless chatter.

"Those monkeys beat any menagerie show I ever saw!" declared Gus, as they stood watching two old fellows, who had evidently got into a dispute over the ownership of a particular cocoanut.

"My, just hear them call each other names! See, now the black has got it! But the red won't let him keep it. See, he has it now, and is going to break it open. There! the black has it again, and he — well, by crickety!"

As Gus uttered the last word he dodged, and just in time. The monkey who held the nut had discovered that he was being watched, and without ceremony had hurled the nut at the stout youth's head.

"Thank you for the nut," said Gus, picking it up and bowing in mock politeness, "but next time please don't present it so forcibly."

Going to a tree, he endeavored to break the shell of the cocoanut by hammering the article against the trunk. As he did so, two more nuts landed beside him.

"Hello! what does this mean?" he exclaimed. "Did I knock those down?"

"No, you didn't; they threw them," replied Oliver. "We had better get out of here before we have our heads cracked open. Look out!" and he dodged just as a perfect volley came raining down.

One of the nuts just grazed Gus's ear, causing him to cry out with pain. He dropped the nut he held and ran across the clearing, followed by Oliver.

"By crickety! but that was a narrow escape!" he cried when they were once more safe. "If one of those nuts had hit us, it would have ended our existence right then and there."

"It will teach us a lesson to mind our own business," returned Oliver. "I suppose that monkey thought we had no right to spy into his affairs."

"I would like to own a monkey," observed Gus; "that is, one that is peaceful. I always thought them so cute."

"They are cute, but not always in the way you

imagine. Come, I suppose we ought to be getting back."

"Oh, there is lots of time! Why, we haven't been gone half an hour yet. Just wait; I want to pick some of those splendid flowers growing near that pond."

"I wouldn't, Gus; for all you know they may be poisonous."

"Do you think they are? They are awfully pretty."

"I don't know; but they might be, and you had better be on the safe side."

"I'll get just one of each. Here, let me have your knife." Gus took Oliver's knife and cut off the flowers he wished. "Phew, what a nasty smell!" he cried in disgust. "That's the worst of it, with so many pretty flowers. The smell — oh, my! how they burn! My hand is on fire!"

He threw the flowers away from him and danced around in pain, shaking his hands in the air.

"Oh, I hope you have not been poisoned!" cried Oliver. "Go wash your hands in the pool."

"You won't catch me fooling around any flowers again; that is, strange ones," said Gus, as he did as directed. "My, what a nasty place this is! No wonder the railroads have to offer a man a small fortune to work for them. I wouldn't — Oh, Oliver,

look! what is that?" And straightening up, the stout youth pointed to the opposite side of the bit of water. "It looked like the head of a turtle or something," he went on. "I wonder if there are any turtles here?"

"I don't see why there shouldn't be. Still it might have been something else. Let us go."

"Wait till I have a shy at it with this gourd." Gus poised the gourd in his hand and let drive. "There! I reckon I hit him. Oh, my stars!"

Gus tumbled back in great haste, and Oliver did the same. The supposed turtle's head had suddenly lifted, and there was revealed a hissing snake, fully eight feet long.

"A snake!" cried both.

For an instant the reptile seemed to stand nearly upright, its eyes glittering, and its slimy body quivering with anger. Then with a final hiss it darted headfirst into the pool and disappeared.

"Huh! that gives me a chill!" cried Gus. "I wonder where he has gone?"

"Perhaps he is coming after us," replied Oliver. "Let us get out of here as fast as we can."

"I don't think he will make his appearance again, but still we had better go. There may be more."

"There are!" cried Oliver. "See there!" He pointed almost under their feet and pulled Gus

away. "That is the same or his mate. Let us run for it."

There was no necessity for the last words, for both were running as fast as the nature of the ground would permit. The snake followed for a short distance, and then was lost to view.

But the boys kept right on, and it was not until both found themselves in a perfect labyrinth of undergrowth that they slackened their pace and finally came to a stop.

"Thank Heaven we have got away from him," exclaimed Gus, puffing to catch his breath. "Huh! I can almost feel him coiling around my body!"

"So can I," returned Oliver. "Of all things to meet I think a snake is the worst. I would just as lief encounter a tiger or a lion."

"Let us get back at once," said Gus; "I won't feel safe until I am in the car, and when I am you won't catch me leaving the train again until we arrive at Panama."

"Just my sentiments," rejoined Oliver. "Let us —"

He stopped short. "Where are we?"

Both suddenly gazed around them in alarm. Which way should they turn? Neither knew. They were lost in the forest!

CHAPTER XV.

AN ADVENTURE ON THE ISTHMUS.

Lost in the forest! Oliver and Gus looked at each other with blanched faces. Here indeed was a sorry situation. What was to be done?

On every side could be seen nothing but the dense undergrowth and tall trees. They might be only a hundred feet from the railroad, or they might be a mile away.

"We were very foolish not to note the path," said Oliver. "Have you any idea which way we ought to turn?"

"I have not, excepting that we might trace the way back to that pool," answered Gus. "And I don't want to do that if I can help it," he added with a shudder. "I'd rather tramp five miles than face those snakes again."

"So would I. But we must try some way. Here, let us see if we cannot get our bearings by the sun. Now, I think this is the right direction," went on Oliver, after a careful survey of the light overhead.

"And I think it is this way," affirmed Gus, point-

ing out a course directly at right angles with the other. "Come, let us try that opening beyond."

Gus insisted that he was right, and somewhat against his will, Oliver followed his chum. They crossed the clearing, and then plunged into another mass of bushes and vines, the stout lad leading.

"Hold up!" he shouted suddenly. "Don't come any farther, or you'll get into a regular bog-hole!" And he turned and hastily scrambled back to where Oliver stood.

"It's lucky I stopped where I did," he went on; "if we hadn't we would have got into a pool worse than the other one was. My! what a beastly place this is!"

More dismayed than ever, they made their way back to the clearing. Something must be done, but what?

"If we don't get back soon, the train will leave without us," said Oliver. "Come, let us try the direction I thought was right." And off they started as fast as they could.

It was miserable walking, and before they had proceeded a hundred steps both had their feet wet, and unfortunate Gus had his coat torn in a dozen places.

"It's positively the worst place I ever got into!" he groaned. "If we don't get out soon I won't have a patch of clothing left."

On and on they went, until Oliver called a halt.

"No use to go farther. If this was the right road we would have crossed the track long ago. We are going wrong, and that is all there is to it."

"But what shall we do?" demanded Gus, more dismayed than ever. "We can't stand still here."

Oliver leaned against a tree. Truly their position was far from enviable. Suppose they should be left, what would they do when night came on?

"I don't know," he replied in a low voice. "If we could only — hark! what is that?"

Both listened intently. From a distance came the unmistakable sound of a steam-whistle.

"It's the locomotive!" cried Gus. "They are getting ready to start!"

"Hurry up," cried Oliver. "Come, this way."

And he sprang off through the bushes at the top of his speed. It was a rough journey, but what was that compared to the agonizing thought that they might be left behind?

Fortunately the steam-whistle continued sounding, and it proved a good guide; for in ten minutes more they reached the railroad track, and just beyond stood the train, all ready to start.

"Thank fortune!" cried Oliver, and he waved his hand to the conductor to wait for them.

In another moment they were safe on board and

in their seats, and then the train with a final warning moved off.

"Where have you two been?" asked Mr. Whyland, gazing in astonishment at their torn clothing and wet feet; "I was very much afraid you might miss the train."

"You weren't half as much scared about it as we were," responded Gus ruefully.

Oliver told their story. Mr. Whyland smiled, but shook his head.

"Both of you want to be more careful," he said. "Those flowers may have been poisonous, and also the snakes. It is well enough to go out on a tour of inspection, but one must be mighty cautious."

"I'll not leave the car until we reach Panama," affirmed Gus, and he was as good as his word.

The train moved along slowly, as if feeling its way. Gus said he could very well walk about as fast; but when Oliver suggested that he get out and try it, the stout youth begged to be excused.

On the way they passed a number of villages, none of them very large, and many of them merely a collection of bamboo huts, with a big pole in the center, and covered over for the most part with palm leaves. The natives appeared to be quite respectable, but not over fond of work. Here and there a group could be seen moving slowly about, and singing to them-

selves; or they were to be found in a corner dozing, or contentedly smoking their tobacco.

"It's a lazy life," said Oliver, "but I suppose the climate has something to do with it."

"It has everything to do with it," replied Mr. Whyland. "Still, the people here are more industrious than they used to be before the railroad was built."

Once the train came to a standstill. It was a sort of a station, and on the platform stood a number of the natives of the place — tall, and not bad-looking fellows.

One of them held an immense quantity of small wares by a string over his shoulder, and was trying to dispose of them. He approached the window at which Oliver and Gus were sitting, and could hardly be made to take "no" for an answer.

"I don't want any," said Gus, for at least the tenth time.

"*Si caballeros*," the native insisted. "Yes, gentlemen, only feety centa."

To get rid of the fellow they at last closed the window, and then the man went off in apparent anger.

"They have an idea down here that all Americans are rich, and free to spend their money," said Mr. Whyland. "The same idea prevails in Europe, and American tourists are generally made to pay a little more for what they purchase than other folks."

"I wouldn't mind having some of the things he had to sell, but I have no money to spare," remarked Oliver.

"Just my case," put in Gus. "And it makes me mad enough to have to say no, without having some one insist the other way."

The remainder of the journey took but a short while. Soon the train rolled past a number of ancient and squalid-looking houses, and Mr. Whyland announced that they had reached the outskirts of Panama.

But around the odd-looking station things were not so bad. To be sure all was new and strange to the boys, and they kept their eyes wide open for all such sights.

"They often have most outrageous bull-fights here," said Mr. Whyland as they alighted.

"I should like to see one," rejoined Gus. "Not that I would enjoy the sport, but it would be so strange."

"I would not care to go," put in Oliver. "I think it is too cruel!"

"It is the height of cruelty," responded Mr. Whyland. "I went once. It was held on a Sunday, and a friend insisted that I should accompany him. When the poor beasts were brought out, and a number of things done to enrage them, I was disgusted; and when the fight began I grew sick, not only at heart,

but physically as well. What sport there is in the thing I cannot see."

"Nor can any one else who has any heart," said Oliver decidedly; "it is nothing short of barbarism."

"I wonder when our steamer leaves?" observed Gus, as they walked out upon the street.

"To-morrow morning at ten o'clock. At least, that is what the conductor said," replied Oliver.

"Suppose we go to the office and make sure," said Mr. Whyland. "We do not wish to take any chances. They often make changes here."

So off for the office of the steamship company they started. It was not a great distance, and it took them but a few minutes.

As they neared the spot, they met a number of their fellow-passengers returning with fallen looks.

"Something is wrong," said Oliver. "I just heard that man in brown say it was a shame to be kept waiting so long. Something has happened."

They were not long in finding out what that something was. In entering the harbor, the steamship had got one of her wheels caught in some wreckage and badly damaged. She must be laid up for repairs, and passengers would have to wait for the next steamer.

"And how long will that be?" asked Oliver ruefully.

"Ten days," was the reply.

CHAPTER XVI.

A CHANGE OF PLAN.

It was dismaying news. Ten days to wait in Panama! To the boys, especially to Oliver, it seemed an eternity.

"Might as well settle down here," grumbled Gus. "What in the world are we to do, caged up in this dreary place for a week and a half?"

"The company will have to board us," remarked Mr. Whyland, who was disposed to make the best of the matter. "As far as that goes it will be their loss, not ours."

"But I do not wish to lose the time. I suppose Colonel Mendix is already in San Francisco, or maybe even on his way to the mine," said Oliver.

"That is true. But what can we do?"

"I wonder if there are no other ships that carry passengers?" asked Oliver. "In a place like this there ought to be."

"Yes, but we've got our tickets," put in Gus. "I can't afford to lose the amount I paid on mine."

"We won't lose that," replied Mr. Whyland. "The company will have to take them back for

what they are worth if they cannot carry us at the stipulated time. But is there any other steamer?"

"I suppose we can find out by going down to the different offices," said Oliver. "Suppose we do that before they close for the day?"

"A good plan," rejoined Mr. Whyland. "I do not care to remain here any more than you do."

Stopping an Englishman whom they met, they secured directions to the various shipping-offices, and then started for the nearest at once.

"The Neolia sails in four days," was the reply received here; "but the passenger list is full. No more can be taken."

"I don't care much," remarked Gus when they were once more outside. "Four days to wait are nearly as bad as ten. Maybe we will find something that goes to-morrow."

"Small chance of that, I think," said Mr. Whyland. "Still, let us try."

In five minutes they were at another office. Here they were told that no vessel would sail within several days, and nearly every one was full.

"I thought it would be so," said Mr. Whyland when they stood outside once more. "Perhaps the steamship company has bought up the places."

At that moment a man with a nautical bearing stepped up and tapped Oliver on the shoulder.

"Excuse me," said he; "but didn't I see you in the steamship office inquiring about passage to San Francisco?"

"You did," replied Oliver. "What of it?"

"Maybe I can accommodate ye, seeing as how the Polly Eliza is going to sail first thing to-morrow morning," responded the stranger. "My name is Morris, Niles Morris, and I'm part owner and captain of the Polly Eliza, as trim a little coast steamer as there is in these parts. If you want to ship with me, now is your chance, one or all of ye."

Oliver looked at the man. He was short and stout, with a ruddy face, and his voice had a hearty ring.

"We do want passage," said Oliver. "What do you say?" the last to Mr. Whyland.

"We would like to see your vessel," replied that gentleman. "Is she lying anywhere near?"

"Just down at the end of the bay. Come right along with me and I'll show ye. You'll find her with first-class accommodations, even if she is small."

Captain Morris led the way along the street, down a long wharf, and into a small rowboat. In five minutes they reached a spot where a neat-looking steamer was lying. They were taken aboard, and found what her captain had said was true. All was as new as a pin, and it pleased the boys as well as Mr. Whyland.

"And you sail to-morrow morning?" said the latter.

"Aye, sir; we'll be outside by ten o'clock."

"And what will you take the three of us for?"

"Were you going by the steamer?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll do it for just what the steamer has to allow you for your tickets — or, in other words, I'll take your tickets for the trip."

"That is certainly very fair. Are you sure you can dispose of the tickets?"

"Oh, a captain always can. An ordinary passenger might have trouble, but we never do. Just give me your tickets, and I'll give you passes on my vessel for the trip."

"Well, I guess" — began Mr. Whyland.

"How long will it take you to reach San Francisco?" put in Oliver.

"About twenty days, if we have favorable weather."

"I mean at the most."

"Not over twenty-six days."

The two boys and Mr. Whyland held a brief consultation. At the conclusion they informed Captain Morris that they had decided to accept his offer, and the transfer of tickets was made on the spot.

"Mr. Willett, the purser, will show you to your staterooms," said Captain Morris after their business was concluded. "There are two nice ones close together that you will occupy, and he will make it comfortable for ye."

Mr. Willett was called, and he at once led the way below. They found everything as Captain Morris had described it, and in less than an hour they felt quite at home.

"This is a lucky thing for us in more ways than one," said Mr. Whyland to Oliver. "If Colonel Mendix has discovered that we are on his track this new move will throw him off. He will think we are here in Panama waiting for the steamer while we will be half-way to San Francisco."

"That is true," returned Oliver, "and I am glad of it, although I guess he hasn't the slightest idea that I am after him."

"I wish I could say the same. But I have a feeling that that is not so in my case. He is an awfully sharp fellow."

"Let us trust he has overreached himself," said Oliver hopefully.

They took their evening meal at a small restaurant in the town, and later on strolled along the all but deserted battlements of the coast, and one or two of the ancient looking streets, and around a tumbled-down convent.

"Panama is almost a city of the past," remarked Mr. Whyland. "Its former glory seems to be gone for good."

At nine o'clock a boat came to the wharf to take

them and Captain Morris and the first mate on board. It was a fine moonlight evening; but as soon as they reached the deck of the Polly Eliza they went below, so heavy was the night dew.

Oliver, with Gus as a room-mate, slept soundly that night. When he awoke the peculiar noise overhead told him that the ship was getting underway. He sprang up and aroused his companion.

"Don't want to get up. Let me sleep," mumbled Gus.

"You've got to," was all Oliver replied; and he gave Gus a poke that started the stout youth at once.

"Wonder you wouldn't wake a fellow in the middle of the night," grumbled Gus, as he began slowly to dress.

"Middle of the night? It's seven o'clock, at least."

"Well, what of it? You say it as if it meant ten."

"Oh, come, Gus, hurry up. We want to see the steamer leave Panama — at least I do."

In five minutes more Oliver was on deck, and the stout lad slowly followed him. They found that Mr. Whyland was ahead of them.

"We are off," said that gentleman. "We shall not set foot on ground again until we land in San Francisco."

CHAPTER XVII.

A STARTLING CRY.

"WON'T we stop at any points in Mexico?" asked Oliver.

"I think not. Captain Morris is anxious to make the voyage as quickly as possible, for he thinks he can get a good return cargo."

"If we had the time to spare I wouldn't like anything better than to stop at La Libertad, Champerico, and the rest of the towns," continued Oliver; "I love to see strange places."

"I think most every one does," returned Mr. Whyland. "I have traveled for many years, and I never tire of it. There is always something unexpected turning up."

"I like to keep moving," put in Gus; "I hate to stay too long in one place. Now, take a town like Panama, for instance; a day or two is sufficient to see all there is to be seen."

"You are quite mistaken there," replied Mr. Whyland. "There are many ancient convents and historic ruins there, which, if studied up, would prove interesting for several weeks; that is, if you didn't have anything else on your mind."

The Polly Eliza was steaming down the bay rapidly. In a couple of hours she had passed the point. The day was a delightful one, and the three spent the entire forenoon on deck.

"This used to be a very odd kind of a voyage during the first years of the gold fever," said Mr. Whyland. "There were very few steamers, and the sailing-vessels took from sixty to ninety days to reach San Francisco."

"Didn't some people come by sailing-vessels all the way around Cape Horn?" asked Gus.

"Yes; almost all the first people that did not go overland came that way. It was a tedious journey. The second vessel that made the trip took nine months."

"Nine months!" exclaimed Oliver. "Why, that is three-quarters of a year."

"When they reached the Golden Gate nearly half of the passengers were sick with scurvy, and many of them were buried up to their necks in the ground to cure them."

"I wouldn't want to take any such trip as that," put in Gus. "I would get so sick of seeing nothing but water and sky I wouldn't know what to do."

"It is no easy matter to double the Horn, as it is called," continued Mr. Whyland. "It took that vessel nearly seven weeks to do it. Every time she

was nearly around, the fierce trade winds from the Pacific would drive her back."

"I'm glad I didn't have to go that way," said Gus with a grimace.

"So you see this voyage is really nothing," laughed Mr. Whyland.

During the afternoon it began to grow foggy, and then the two boys went below and put their stateroom in order.

This task was hardly completed before Gus began to feel queer and drew down the corners of his mouth.

"What's the matter?" asked Oliver, although he suspected the cause.

"I—I—am afraid I—I"—stammered the stout youth.

"Seasick?"

"Yes."

"Better rest in the bunk for a while."

"I guess I will."

In half an hour poor Gus was as bad as ever. Oliver did all for his chum that he could think of, and even went to the purser for advice.

"Can't do a thing," replied Mr. Willett. "Perhaps he may not be so bad as he was on the trip around Cape Hatteras."

"I trust not," returned Oliver. "I haven't been seasick myself, but I imagine it's something awful."

"It is," responded the purser. "Get it real bad and you won't care whether you live or not. I have followed the sea for twelve years, but once in a while my stomach goes back on me even yet."

"Why, I thought sailors never got sick!"

"That's a big mistake. You may be a sailor all your life and get it just as bad as if it were your first voyage. You can thank your stars that you are not one of the seasick kind."

"Yes; I am lucky that way."

Poor Gus lay in the cabin all that afternoon and all night. In the morning he felt better, however, and though rather weak, managed to eat a little breakfast.

"Now I hope I'm over it for good," he said. "If I am not I'll just jump overboard, that's what I'll do."

"And make food for the sharks," laughed Mr. Whyland. "Just look out there at the ferocious fellows moving around. That one would just make about three mouthfuls of you."

As he spoke he pointed over the side to where an ugly shovel-nose shark was swimming leisurely along.

"Ough!" shuddered Gus, drawing back. "I didn't see him."

"I suppose he would think you were a good fat morsel," laughed Oliver.

There was a general smile, and then Mr. Whyland pointed directly to the westward.

"That is the Island of Quibo, and far back of it you can see the coast line of Central America. We are getting along, true enough."

That day and the next flew by rapidly. There were many things on board the small coast steamer that were new to the two boys, and as the purser had taken a decided liking to them they gained much information by "nosing around," as Gus put it.

One evening they found themselves far out of sight of land. All hands enjoyed a beautiful sunset, and it was nearly eight o'clock when the little party went below.

"Getting more used to it?" asked Mr. Whyland, as they separated for the night after a quiet game of dominoes in the cabin.

"Somewhat," replied Oliver.

"I'm not," said Gus. "I wish something real exciting would happen. Something that would stir up a fellow's blood."

"Are you anxious to be shipwrecked?" laughed Mr. Whyland.

"No, not that exactly; but I hate to have things so tame."

"Well, maybe something will happen," was the quiet reply.

Little did Mr. Whyland realize how quickly his thought would become a fact. Had he done so it is not likely that he would have gone to his cabin with such a tranquil heart.

When they reached their stateroom the two boys sat for a long time discussing matters in general, the principal question being what should each do when the steamer reached San Francisco.

"You had better telegraph to your father, Gus. He will be very anxious concerning your whereabouts."

"I'll do that, Oliver," was the stout youth's reply. "I begin to see that running away wasn't such a brilliant thing to do after all."

"Now you've hit the nail right on the head," replied Oliver; and he said no more.

Half an hour later both boys were in their berths and sleeping soundly. How long they remained in this state neither could tell exactly.

Suddenly Oliver awoke with a start. He jumped out on the floor wondering what had aroused him. Gus, too, was wide awake.

"Somebody hammered on the door," cried the stout youth. "Maybe—"

He did not finish, for at that instant a wild cry came from the deck overhead.

"Fire! Fire! Fire!"

Both stared at each other with blanched faces.

CHAPTER XVIII.

OLIVER'S HEROISM.

It would be useless to deny the fact that Oliver and Gus were thoroughly startled when they heard the cry of fire that came from the deck of the Polly Eliza.

They could easily realize the danger of their situation. Out of sight of land, and in the darkness of night, which way should they turn? What could they do?

"Let us hurry on deck," cried Oliver. "There is not a moment to spare."

There was no need to hurry Gus, for that youth was already struggling to get into his clothing. By the time Oliver was ready, Gus was also dressed. As they rushed out and into the cabin, they met Mr. Whyland. He was deadly pale.

"I was just going to call you," he said. "I was afraid you had not heard the cries."

"What is the matter?" asked Oliver. "Where is the fire?"

"In the forward hold. It started in some loose waste that ought never to have been allowed there."

"Is it dangerous?" faltered Gus.

"I hope not; but we cannot tell. It is a hard fire to get at."

By this time the three were on deck. All was confusion. The pump attached to the engine had been brought into play, and the sailors were pouring the water into the hold as well as they were able.

"Don't be alarmed," said Captain Morris, as calmly as he could. "It may be all over in an hour. It is a small fire."

"But a nasty one, I take it," put in the purser, who stood near.

"Why don't the men go below and try to locate the flames?" asked Oliver, as he noted that no one went below decks.

"Sailors have too much horror of fire," responded Mr. Whyland; "and Captain Morris's place is here on deck."

"They might do a good deal more good by going below," put in Gus.

Meanwhile the fire began to spread towards the stern. All the sailors began to shake their heads, and several said it would be better to spend the time in getting ready to leave the steamer.

"Leave the ship!" exclaimed Captain Morris, "Leave the Polly Eliza! Not much! If I wasn't so old and asthmatic I'd go down into the hold myself."

Oliver stood for a moment in meditation.

"Let me go down," he said suddenly. "If somebody don't go the ship may burn up and we'll all go to the bottom. If I can't do any good I'll come up at once."

And without waiting for a reply, Oliver hurried towards the partly closed hatchway.

There was a small step-ladder at hand, and getting the sailors to help him put this down, Oliver took a deep breath and quickly descended into the hold.

"There's bravery for you!" exclaimed Captain Morris. "I should think this would make some of you feel mighty cheap," he added to the men.

It was indeed a bold thing to do. The hold was one mass of thick, stifling smoke, and breathing down there was next to impossible.

As soon as Oliver reached the bottom he dropped on his hands and knees. Dragging the nozzle of the hose behind him, he crawled rapidly to the spot where the flames arose.

A minute later and he was right beside the fire. He saw that it was confined to some loose waste, as Mr. Whyland had said, and also to half a dozen bales of cloth stored close at hand.

By the time Oliver had made this discovery his eyes were all but blinded, and his head swam as it never had before.

"I'll fix this pipe fast so the water will pour right on the fire," he thought; "then there will be no use in staying."

After some little difficulty this was done. The effects of the water pouring directly on the flames told at once. But the smoke became thicker than ever, and Oliver hurried to the hatchway.

As soon as he appeared in the opening he was hauled out. He was so weak he could not stand. He sank in a heap on a seat.

"I left the hose pouring water right on the fire," he gasped. "If somebody will go down you can have the fire out in ten minutes."

"I will go," said Mr. Willett. "I will not be outdone by a boy, even though he be as noble as this lad." And he disappeared down the hatchway.

Anxiously those on deck waited for him to reappear. At the end of five minutes he did so.

"It is about out," he reported. "The hose has soaked everything, and there is no more danger. The smoke that is coming up doesn't amount to anything."

"Thank God it is so!" exclaimed Mr. Whyland; and everybody near echoed the sentiment.

"Our safety is due to this young man," said Captain Morris, grasping Oliver by the shoulder. "You deserve a medal for your bravery."

At this Oliver was compelled to blush. But he blushed even more when a cheer, led by Gus, was taken up by all hands.

"I didn't do so much," he said.

"You did enough," rejoined Mr. Whyland. "What more could be wanted than that?"

"I shall never forget the service," put in the captain heartily; "I don't know what I would have done had the Polly Eliza been burned. She has been my home for so many years."

A little later a number of the sailors went below, and under directions from the purser, made a thorough search of the hold. It was thought every spark of fire had been extinguished; but to make doubly sure two of the men were told to remain on guard for the balance of the night and all the next day.

"Then I suppose we might as well go to bed again," said Gus who, now that the excitement was over, began to feel sleepy.

"Yes; there is no further danger," returned Captain Morris. "To-morrow I will hold a strict investigation as to the cause of the fire. If I find any of the men are to blame, they shall pay the penalty, I can tell you."

Mr. Whyland went below, and Oliver followed Gus to their stateroom. Both undressed and turned in, but it was nearly daylight before either of them dropped asleep.

Oliver was the first to awaken. He turned to his friend and found the stout youth tossing and mumbling uneasily to himself.

"Fire! Save me! save me!" mumbled Gus.

Oliver gave him a vigorous shaking, and the stout youth sat up and rubbed his eyes.

"Where — where?" he stammered. "Thank goodness it was only a dream! I thought I was down in the hole, burning up."

"Well, you were wishing for an adventure and you got one," laughed Oliver. "Want any more of them?"

"Not just for the present," replied Gus with a shiver. "Suppose you and the rest hadn't put out the fire, what then?"

"It would have been bad enough, and no mistake," replied Oliver.

At the breakfast-table Captain Morris again thanked Oliver for what he had done. He said he had found out that the fire had been caused by friction amongst the cargo, and that no one in particular was to blame.

During the day, the sailors busied themselves in throwing out all the burned matter and in rearranging the cargo, so that a repetition of the affair might not occur.

Oliver and Gus watched the operation for a while, and then turned their attention to the sea where countless sharks loomed up in all directions.

"The water here is generally full of them," said Mr. Whyland. "I have spent a day or two fishing for them."

"Fishing for them?" repeated Oliver in surprise.

"Yes."

"I thought you had to spear them."

"Oh, no; you can catch them with a hook and line provided both be strong enough."

"I'd like to try the sport," said Gus.

"We will do so to-morrow if Captain Morris will lend us a hook and line. He is too busy to be bothered now."

The answer did not quite suit Gus. Having heard of shark fishing, he was anxious to try it at once. A little later he procured a large hook and a stout line from the purser, and some meat from the cook, and began to fish on his own account.

At this time Oliver was in deep conversation with Mr. Whyland. They were speaking of the Aurora mine, and did not notice what Gus was doing.

Suddenly came a sharp cry for help. Gus had caught a shark and was unable to hold the ugly monster. The two made a dash for the rail; but before they could reach the boy's side the line tightened, and with a wild cry Gus slid overboard.

CHAPTER XIX.

GUS HAS AN ADVENTURE.

THE accident that had happened to the stout youth was easily explained. In order to make sure that the line should not slip through his hands, Gus had very foolishly tied it about his wrist; and when it became evident that he could not haul in the shark, he found that neither could he loosen the line, which was now pulled into a hard knot.

He then braced himself against the rail and raised the cry for help heard by the others. But the strain on his arm was terrible, and when the shark gave an extra heavy tug, Gus went overboard in a twinkling.

The tension on the rope carried him fully fifteen feet from the steamer. He struck the water with a loud splash, and then disappeared beneath the surface.

"Man overboard!" cried Oliver. "Good heavens! what shall we do?"

"Man the boat!" sang out Captain Morris, who saw at a glance what had taken place. "Quick, boys! Sharks are thick here!"

These last words carried terror to Oliver's heart.

They could bear but one meaning, and that was that poor Gus was in danger of being devoured.

"What can we do?" he asked, appealing to Mr. Whyland.

"Not much. They are getting the boat out as fast as they can. Your friend was very foolish to tie that line fast to his wrist."

"See! see! the shark is making for him!" cried Oliver in a strained voice. "What can we do? Oh, Mr. Whyland!"

"We can do nothing. Heaven grant they reach the poor boy in time. But — but — I fear not!" And the gentleman turned away to hide his emotion.

Oliver glanced around. It was terrible to be so helpless. He and Gus were the closest of friends. He could never let his chum perish without trying to save him. He ought to do something — he would do something!

He looked along the deck, and his gaze fell upon a short but stout knife that the sailors had used in cutting away some of the half-burned bales of cloth. He picked up the knife, and taking it between his teeth, stripped off his coat.

"What are you going to do?" asked Mr. Whyland, hurrying towards him.

"See if I cannot help him," was Oliver's determined reply.

"But the peril —"

"I would never forgive myself if Gus perished and I did not do a thing to save him."

And before the other could interfere, Oliver was on the rail and over the side.

"The bravery of one boy in a thousand," murmured Mr. Whyland to himself. "I would give half I possess to have such a son!"

Oliver had made a careful calculation before he left the rail, and when he rose to the surface of the water he was not over two yards away from Gus. He struck out at once, and in an instant was beside his friend.

"Oliver! Save me!"

"Is the rope fast to your wrist?"

"Yes."

"Let me cut it."

Gus held up his arm, and the next moment the cord was severed.

"Now strike out for the steamer," said Oliver. "The shark is after you!"

And side by side they struck out.

But the shark was already close at hand. Try their best, they could not get away from him. Gus gave a piercing shriek.

"He is after my foot!"

"Dive!" called out Oliver; and he set the example.

Gus followed. When they rose again, the shark was but a few feet away. They could see him getting ready to turn over, preparatory to opening his jaws for a snap at either one or the other.

The monster turned toward Gus. The stout youth gave another cry of terror.

"Help! Help!"

Then Oliver thought of the knife still in his hand. Grasping the handle of the weapon firmly, he swam up, and buried the blade deeply in the shark's head.

There was a wild slashing of the monster's tail, and the water was dyed crimson. A moment later the boat appeared, and Gus was hauled in.

Then the shark turned his attention to Oliver. But the boy struck out firmly with the knife, once, twice, three times; and then the shark turned over and floated off — dead.

"The bravest deed I ever saw!" cried Mr. Willett, as they helped Oliver into the boat. "After this don't dare to tell me the age of heroes is gone by."

"Can we get that shark?" panted Oliver. "I — I would like to keep some part of the fellow as a remembrance of this event."

"We'll haul him on board," said Mr. Willett. And later on this was done.

When they turned their attention to Gus they found that he had fainted. It took fully a quarter of an

hour's work to restore him to consciousness, and even then he was so weak from the terror of what had occurred that he had to lie down for the remainder of the day.

Now that it was all over, Oliver, too, felt rather shaky in the legs. However, he watched the men get the shark aboard, and then spent some time in examining the monster.

"As large a shovel-nose as I have ever seen," said Captain Morris. "It's a wonder that he didn't make mince-meat of both of you."

The boy selected some of the teeth, and after they were broken out of the jaw-bone, the carcass was sent to the galley to be tried out.

"I guess we won't want to go shark fishing after this," said Mr. Whyland.

"No," rejoined Oliver with a shiver; "I don't even want to see another of the ugly things!"

"They are awfully dangerous creatures," went on Mr. Whyland. "Many a one-legged sailor has had the missing limb taken off by just such a fellow as this."

"And many a sailor has had his head taken off instead of his leg," put in Captain Morris. "I wouldn't do what you did for a thousand dollars!"

"Neither would I again," replied Oliver; "but I think too much of Gus to let him become food for sharks."

After this they separated, and Oliver went down to the stateroom. No sooner did he enter than Gus threw his arms about his chum's neck.

"Oh, Olly! how can I thank you?" he cried. "You saved my life!" And the tears streamed down his cheeks.

"Don't try to do it, Gus. I know you would have done as much for me if it was necessary."

"I don't know. You are awfully brave. I'll never forget it as long as I live!"

"I guess you've had enough adventures on this trip," said Oliver. He found his own eyes growing moist, and he thought best to turn the matter into a laugh.

"Yes, indeed! I sha'n't attempt another thing while I am on board."

On the following day the steamer sighted Mazatlan. The course of the Polly Eliza was now directly across the bay of Lower California.

"We shall soon be in sight of Cape St. Lucas," said Captain Morris; "and unless something happens we'll soon reach the Golden Gate."

Fortunately the weather remained fine, and the little party was thus enabled to spend the days on deck. Much about the little coast steamer pleased the boys, and Captain Morris and the others made every effort to have the time pass pleasantly.

"It won't be long afore we part," he said to Oliver. "I trust we may meet again some day; but if we don't you can make up your mind that I'll never forget what you did towards saving the Polly Eliza from destruction."

"Will you remain long in San Francisco?" asked Oliver.

"Only long enough to get my cargo. But if I can be of service to you I'll stay a week," added the captain quickly.

"I only wanted to know where the mining boards and stock companies are located."

"Most of them are on Montgomery and Pine Streets. You'll find them in the directory."

"Then that's all I want to know for the present."

The time seemed to drag now, so impatient were the boys to set foot on shore. Mr. Whyland could not help but smile at both of them, though he himself was also very eager to have the voyage over.

But all journeys must come to an end, and one fine morning the Polly Eliza dropped anchor just outside of one of the many wharves.

Then the boat took them and Mr. Whyland ashore. They were not long in scrambling up the dock.

"San Francisco at last!" cried Oliver.

CHAPTER XX.

A FLYING GLANCE.

"YES, San Francisco at last," repeated Gus and Mr. Whyland; and the latter added, "Now, the question is, what is it best to do first?"

"I guess we'll find out quick enough," said Oliver. "Let us take a look about the city and see if we can find out if Colonel Mendix has arrived."

"Of course he has arrived; that is, unless he stopped on the way."

"That is just what I mean. He may have stopped in Chicago or St. Louis for that machinery he wished to purchase."

"I don't think it would be a bad plan to look over the registers at the various hotels."

"That's a good idea," replied Oliver. "We can do that this morning."

"I know what I am going to do," said Gus. "I'm going to the post-office and see if my father has written to me."

"Let's all go," burst out Oliver. "I am as anxious to hear from home as any one."

"And so am I," laughed Mr. Whyland.

They had landed near the foot of Brannan Street, and now walked up to Kearney Street. A policeman directed them to the post-office, and it did not take the party long to reach the place.

There were letters for all three. How eagerly Oliver cut open the envelope and read that which had been penned by his father! This was what he wrote: —

"I trust that when you receive this you will have had a safe journey. I suppose you found the trip a tedious one, not because it is devoid of interest, but because you were undoubtedly anxious to reach its end and begin the active part of your quest.

"I received you letter containing the particulars of what occurred in New York. I believe you are able to go ahead without my advice, and all I have to say is, be careful; for I am now sure that Colonel Mendix is a thoroughly bad man, and may get desperate if brought to bay.

"I inclose you an express money-order for one hundred dollars. Use it as you think best. I know you will not do so recklessly.

"I suppose that Gregory boy is with you. If he is, see that he does not get into trouble. His parents are much worried about him.

"I am getting well rapidly, and expect to be about before long. In the meanwhile I trust you will keep me posted on what you are doing, as I am getting more anxious every day. Write as soon as you receive this."

Such was the gist of the affectionate father's epistle. But there was much besides, — kind, loving

words that need not be repeated here, but which, nevertheless, went straight to Oliver's heart.

"I'll write him a letter at once," he thought; and buying stamps and paper, did so, stating that a long letter would follow almost immediately.

Gus Gregory's face lengthened considerably when he read the letter his father had written to him. It was kind, but firm, and told how much all at home had suffered on account of his unexpected departure. When Gus read how his mother had wept over his foolish act, his own eyes grew dim, and he half wished himself back at Rockvale.

But the latter end of the letter was more cheerful. Mr. Gregory had intended, during the summer following, to let his son take a trip to Europe before settling down to college work. Now, instead, he wrote that Gus might spend the present time in California, and give up the trip across the ocean.

He also inclosed a money-order for fifty dollars, and said that more might follow when he heard what his son was doing. He also hoped that Gus was with Oliver and that they would stay together, for he knew that Oliver was a manly fellow and one to be trusted.

Oliver blushed when Gus showed him this part of the letter.

"Oh, nonsense," he exclaimed; "you are big enough to take care of yourself."

"No, I am not, as that adventure with the shark proves," replied the stout youth. "Just wait till I write to them about that."

"I suppose you will make it as sensational as you can, and put me in as a regular dime-novel hero," laughed Oliver; and he blushed more than ever.

Mr. Whyland's letter was from his business partners, and told him that everything in the East was running smoothly. This news brought great relief to him, and he said that now he would be able to bend all his energies to hunting down Colonel Mendix and the Aurora mine swindle.

"I think we had better attend to our money-orders first," suggested Oliver.

This was agreed to, and they started out at once. Being strangers, they had some difficulty in getting the orders cashed; but finally this was accomplished, and the two boys emerged upon the streets richer than before.

"Now that father has written that I can stay in California for a while, I intend to unite my fortunes with you," said Gus; "that is, if you will allow me to do so."

"I am perfectly willing, if you wish it," replied Oliver; "but I do not know about Mr. Whyland."

"I shall be pleased to have Mr. Gregory along if he wishes to come," said that gentleman. "But you

must remember we may have some pretty rough experiences before we accomplish what we have set out to do," he added seriously.

"I am willing to put up with whatever comes, sir."

"The West is not the East in more ways than one," continued Mr. Whyland. "Many things are mighty rough here, especially when you get up in the mountains."

From the express-office they started for the nearest hotel, where they looked carefully over the register; but looked in vain.

"Failure number one," said Oliver. "I suppose we may have a number of them before we are lucky enough to strike the right house."

"It would be funny if we ran across this Mendix the first thing," said Gus. "My, wouldn't he be surprised!"

"He doesn't know me, I believe," said Oliver.

"And that is where you have an advantage," put in Mr. Whyland. "Perhaps you can get into his good graces, and learn much before you make yourself known."

"That is certainly an idea," returned Oliver.

From the first hotel they went to a number of others, but nowhere could a trace of the colonel be found.

"I have half an idea he uses a false name while

here," suggested Oliver. "A man like him would not hesitate at anything."

"It may be so. If it is, there is no use in searching further. Suppose we go around to some of the mining stock brokers or to the exchange? We may find out about him there. We will certainly discover something of the Aurora mine."

This was agreed to, and the remainder of the forenoon was spent down in Pine and Montgomery Streets. They entered a great number of offices, but no one had heard of the Aurora mine, nor did any one know such a person as Colonel Mendix.

"This completely baffles me," said Mr. Whyland at last. "I was sure the mine would be known here. How can he work it if it is not known? Such a place must give employment to scores of men. It is a great mystery."

"We *must* find out about it," replied Oliver with determination. "I sha'n't give up in this fashion. If I can't find him by his name I'll see if there isn't some one who knows him from his appearance."

"Good! I like such grit!" cried Mr. Whyland. "If your determination has anything to do with it we shall certainly win."

They were out on the street once more. Oliver had the address of a large hotel on Market Street, and this place he said he would visit and examine the register.

"It won't take a great deal of time," he said, "and I don't want a single chance to slip of bringing him to justice."

"That's right," put in Gus. "Do the work thoroughly while you are about it."

Suddenly Mr. Whyland gave a cry and pointed to a cable-car that was just then passing.

"See, it is Mendix himself!" he exclaimed, indicating a man on the rear platform.

Oliver looked, and saw that he was right.

CHAPTER XXI.

AN UNSUCCESSFUL PURSUIT.

OLIVER BRIGHT, as may be imagined, was astonished when Mr. Whyland discovered the very man they were looking for, standing calmly on the rear end of a passing cable-car.

For an instant he doubted the evidence of his own eyesight, but a second look told him that in truth it was the colonel.

For a moment he stood still. Then he started forward to stop the car.

But those in charge did not see him and the cable-car went bounding on its way with Oliver after it.

Mr. Whyland and Gus started to run also, but soon gave up the chase.

"I am getting too old for that sort of thing," gasped the former, as he leaned against a building, all out of breath.

"And I get winded too easily," groaned the stout youth. "Oliver must catch the fellow alone."

"I hope he will succeed. We may not get another such chance." And then they both started on a walk in the direction in which the car had gone.

Meanwhile the car kept moving at a rapid rate, with the boy nearly a block behind it. Sometimes Oliver would get nearer, but then he would lose time at some crossing and the distance would be increased.

Finally, at the end of eight or ten blocks, he managed to come up to the car, and as it stopped, he sprang on board.

He gave a hasty look around. Colonel Mendix had disappeared.

Oliver was deeply chagrined. Was it possible that he had made a mistake in the car?

"It looks like the same car," he thought; "but then they all look alike."

Presently the conductor came to him, and Oliver asked him if a Spanish gentleman had been aboard.

"What kind of a looking man?"

Oliver described Colonel Mendix as best he could.

"Yes, he was on; got off two or three blocks back; maybe four," was the conductor's reply.

"Thank you," replied Oliver; and he hopped off the car and started to retrace his steps.

"Too bad he couldn't have remained on the car a minute longer," he muttered to himself. "I suppose he has disappeared into some building or down some side street by this time. I'll go back and take a look around."

He had proceeded about three blocks when he came face to face with the others.

"What luck?" cried Mr. Whyland.

Oliver told him.

"Too bad, after such a splendid chance."

"I'd keep a sharp lookout for him along here," put in Gus; "he can't be far off."

"I have a plan," returned Oliver. "Let us separate, and each watch several squares. By doing that we can cover nearly all the ground necessary."

"A good idea," cried Mr. Whyland. "We will carry it out at once."

"And where shall we meet again?" asked Gus.

"In front of this large building," said Oliver, "at one o'clock."

They immediately separated, and each proceeded to watch in his own way. Oliver peered into every store and office, and down every street, but without success. At the end of the time appointed he went back to the designated meeting-place.

Mr. Whyland was already there.

Neither had had any luck.

In five minutes Gus arrived.

"I thought I saw him," he said. "I tried to follow, but at the end of the block I found I was mistaken."

"So we are now no further ahead than we ever were," remarked Oliver, somewhat bitterly.

"Never mind; we won't despair," replied Mr. Whyland. "Remember, we have not been a whole day at the hunt."

"I'm not despairing; but the sooner we find this man the better."

All three were now, not only tired out, but tremendously hungry. Mr. Whyland led the way to a neighboring restaurant, and here they indulged in a substantial dinner.

"Now, what next?" asked Gus.

"I'm going around to that hotel, and then the mining board again," said Oliver. "I shall look for him by appearance, not by name now."

In this quest Oliver decided to go alone. If the three were together they might excite suspicion.

"Then I'll go back to the hotel where we left our baggage," said Mr. Whyland.

"And I'll go and send a telegram to my father," put in Gus. "I suppose he'll be awfully anxious about me until he hears that I am safe."

This was agreed to, and in a moment more Oliver was on his way to Montgomery Street.

"You say the man you are looking for is a tall, dark Spaniard?" inquired one of the gentleman to whom he applied.

"Yes, sir. I thought his name was Mendix." And Oliver described the colonel as fully as was possible.

"I think you mean Colonel Guerotaz," said the man in charge of the office. "He is interested in several mining schemes, I believe, all up the Mokolumne River."

"And where can I find this Colonel Guerotaz?" asked the boy with deep interest.

"I do not know. He was in here several times during the earlier part of the week. I believe he is getting ready to go up the country just as soon as he can get some machinery shipped."

This last statement made Oliver feel certain that the two colonels were the same person. Colonel Mendix had asked Ezra Dodge where he could purchase the machinery he wanted, and that person had informed him he could get it in San Francisco.

"And you do not know anything of the Aurora mine?" went on Oliver.

"I do not. There was an Aurora mine somewhere up the Sacramento River, and another elsewhere; but both of them were abandoned years ago."

Oliver's heart sank for a moment.

"You do not know where the Aurora mine was situated?" he faltered.

"I don't remember exactly. But I am quite sure it was not up the Mokelumne."

"Then neither of them can be the one I am looking for," returned the boy, with something of a sigh of relief.

"Are you interested in the mine?" asked the man kindly.

"My father is. Do you know the names of the mines that this Colonel Guerotaz is interested in?"

"The Excelsior is the principal one, I believe. Then there is the Cortez; but I do not know much about that, nor does any one else."

"And they are both up the Mokelumne River?"

"Yes; you'll find them on the mining-map."

"Thank you, sir."

Oliver quitted the office in deep thought. Of one thing he was certain, — Colonel Mendix and Colonel Guerotaz were one and the same person. Now, could it be possible that the Cortez and the Aurora were one and the same mine?

"It seems to me," he thought, "about the only way he could commit such a piece of villainy would be to change the name of the mine. If he didn't do that any one could easily visit the place and find out its value. I begin to understand how poor, trusting father was duped."

While Oliver had been in the office on Montgomery Street he had not noticed a tall, lank fellow lounging about the door. This man had been deeply interested in the boy's inquiries, and when Oliver left the place the man was not slow to follow.

At the corner he stepped up and tapped Oliver on the shoulder.

"Excuse me," he said in a low voice; "but I would like to have a few words with you on the quiet."

Oliver surveyed the man from head to foot.

"What is it you want?" he asked rather shortly, for he had never seen the fellow before.

"Didn't I hear you say something about the Aurora mine?" asked the man.

"You did," replied Oliver with sudden interest. "What of it?"

"I know all about that mine," was the slow reply.

"You do?" cried the boy. "Who are you?"

"My name is Felix Cottle. I used to be a mining boss. I worked for Colonel Guerotaz for two years. Then we had a terrible row, and he kicked me out; but I know a good many of his secrets."

"Then, perhaps you are just the man I want to see," replied Oliver.

"And you are just the party I want to meet," said Felix Cottle. "By your manner, I take it you have it in for this Spaniard, and I would do 'most anything to get square with him. What do you want to know, and what is it worth to you?"

CHAPTER XXII.

FELIX COTTLE.

OLIVER looked the stranger over well before replying. Perhaps this chap might be a tool of Colonel Mendix, in which case the less he had to do with the fellow the better.

"And you worked for Colonel Men — Guerotaz two years?" he asked slowly.

"Yes."

"At what mine?"

The man closed one eye and winked knowingly.

"At the very mine you are looking for," he replied.

"The Aurora?"

"That's it, partner."

"Then you know its exact location?"

"Of course."

"What is the mine called?"

The man hesitated and rubbed his chin.

"I'll tell you what it is, stranger," he replied slowly; "since I came from the mines I've had mighty tough luck in 'Frisco, and I'm rather hard up. Make it worth a little to me, and I'll give you all the information you wish."

"You mean you wish pay for telling what you know of the place?"

"Well, not that exactly, only a little something to help me along. I've been out of a job for over two months."

Oliver thought for a moment.

"Suppose you come along with me," he said. "I have a friend staying at a hotel close by. He must hear what you have to say as well as I. I will pay you for your trouble."

"This is a square deal?"

"Yes. If you have any real information I will pay whatever it is worth."

"All right, I'll go."

Oliver at once led the way to the hotel at which they had left their traps. He found Mr. Whyland in the reading-room, looking over a copy of the *Call*.

He quickly acquainted the gentleman with what had taken place. Mr. Whyland was deeply interested.

"I guess you are right about the two colonels being the same person," he said. "Let us interview this stranger at once. I am willing to pay him if he really knows anything of value."

Accordingly, Felix Cottle was at once brought in. He wore a rough suit and big boots, and looked quite out of place in the well-furnished apartment.

"I am more at home in the mountains than here," he remarked, as he took a chair beside them. "I was brought up on the streets of Little Rock when a boy; but I would rather travel a lonely trail any day than walk the pavements of a city."

"You know the mining district well, I suppose?" said Mr. Whyland.

"There ain't much of it that I don't know," replied Cottle. "Before I started to work for Guerotaz I spent twelve years and ten thousand dollars prospecting, here, there, and everywhere."

"Did you have any luck?" asked Oliver.

He was interested in the man, and besides wanted a chance to study the stranger.

"I had some luck the first years, — located the Alice and sold her for fifteen thousand dollars, — but towards the last I lost every dollar I had, and then I went to work for the colonel."

"And you know all about his affairs?" asked Mr. Whyland.

The man ran his hand through his matted hair.

"I don't know you, and I don't want to get into any trouble," he said. "I told the young man I knew some things he wanted to know."

"Well, you will get into no trouble with us, I can assure you," replied Mr. Whyland. "If you know the location of the Aurora mine and will tell us, I will pay you well."

"I can take you straight to the Aurora inside of a week," replied Cottle in a low voice.

"Is it a valuable mine?"

"It was some time ago."

"Then that is the mine you worked in?" said Oliver.

The man bit his lip.

"I didn't say so," he said.

"But you meant it," put in Mr. Whyland. "Are not the Cortez and the Aurora one and the same mine?"

Felix Cottle started.

"You want to know everything without paying a cent!" he cried. "I guess I had better get out."

"No, don't go," exclaimed Mr. Whyland, catching him by the arm. "I will pay you well. We want to get to the Aurora mine. You say you know the road—"

"Yes; I'll take you there as straight as straight can be. There ain't a better guide in the town of 'Frisco, if I do say it myself."

"I suppose we'll need a guide—" began Oliver.

"If you don't think so, just start out without one," laughed Felix Cottle in his peculiar voice. "I'll bet you couldn't find the mine even if you had full directions."

"Why?"

"Because of its peculiar situation. Many a man has been fooled on it."

"And you say you can take us there in a week?" asked Mr. Whyland.

"I can, on horseback or muleback."

"And prove to us beyond a doubt that it is really the Aurora?"

"Yes; and that it is run by Colonel Men —"

Cottle stopped short. Oliver took him up.

"Colonel Mendix." He finished.

"Yes; if you must know. But, gents, I expect you to do the square thing to a fellow that is down on his luck."

"We will do the square thing," said Mr. Whyland. "Take us to the Aurora mine and I will pay all expenses and give you one hundred dollars for your trouble."

"Is that square?" asked Cottle, leaning forward.

"It is. If you want any references as to my reliability —"

"Don't want them, partner; the look on your face is enough. I'll take you up. A week from the day you leave 'Frisco you shall stand in the Aurora mine. I may be a little queer, but you can depend on Felix Cottle every time."

Oliver had to like the man in spite of his odd manner. Mr. Whyland was also impressed favorably.

After this a long conversation ensued. Cottle said that the Cortez mine was nothing but a "fake" mine, leading underground to the real mine of value, which was the Aurora. For several years Colonel Mendix had reported the latter mine abandoned, which was not the case.

"And the Aurora is really valuable?" asked Oliver.

He spoke calmly enough, but oh, what excitement was in his breast! How much was at stake for his father and himself!

"I think it is," said Cottle. "Of course the Cortez is worth something, but the best paying rock and dirt come from the Aurora."

It was decided to leave San Francisco that very evening. They were to go direct to Sacramento City, and from there fit themselves out for a five days' journey over and around the mountains.

When Gus came in, he was surprised to see the stranger. He was at once introduced, and was soon on good terms with the newly hired guide.

Cottle remained with them for the balance of the afternoon. When questioned as to Colonel Mendix, he said he thought the colonel would soon be on the way to the mines.

"And we will be directly behind," he added. "Perhaps we may even catch up to him."

"I do not wish to do that," said Oliver. "It is time enough to meet him when we are at the mine."

The party of three spent the night at the hotel. Oliver had a long talk with Mr. Whyland, promising to share whatever expense was incurred. The gentleman agreed to do this, but said the hundred dollars that had been promised to Cottle must come from his own purse.

CHAPTER XXIII.

OFF FOR THE MINES.

"WHAT grand scenery this is!"

It was Oliver who uttered the exclamation. He rode beside Mr. Whyland, while Gus Gregory was directly behind. Cottle, the guide, was but a short distance ahead.

For six hours the little party had been journeying directly for the mountains far back of Sacramento City. The road for the present was a well-defined one, but Cottle said that before sundown it would become little better than a wagon-track.

"It will be as nice a road as any one wants to travel in a few years, I take it," he added; "but I remember the time when there wasn't even a respectable wagon-track. Times change rapidly out here."

"One wouldly hardly think that a handful of years ago this was little more than a wilderness," said Mr. Whyland; "yet such is a fact. The earlier gold-hunters were indeed pioneers."

"I wish I had been one of them," put in Gus. "What excitement it must have been, expecting that every day would bring fortune!"

"It was exciting; but many a man would have done better to have remained at home."

"You're right there," said Cottle. "I knew men that got reckless in the fever and never amounted to shucks after they came away. I've had my fill of it; and if I had my life to lead over again I think I would steer clear of prospecting."

The three were now on good terms with the guide. They found him a rather peculiar individual, but thoroughly honest and obliging. He spent most of the day in describing the country through which they were passing, and Oliver never tired of listening to his words.

Yet the boy's mind was busy with other things. In what condition would they find the Aurora mine? and what would Colonel Mendix say when they appeared so unexpectedly upon the scene?

He could well imagine the Spaniard's surprise. No doubt the man would do all in his power to ward off their advances. He might even deny all their rights to the mine. A man who had acted as the colonel had would not hesitate at anything.

Towards sundown they made camp in a little grove of trees to one side of the road. To Oliver and Gus the proceedings were novel, for in all their lives they had never passed a night in the open.

The mules were tethered a short distance away,

a fire was started, a pot of water was set boiling for the purpose of making coffee, and from out of the various packs the boys and Mr. Whyland took such articles as they wished for the evening meal.

"To-morrow we will be getting more into a game country," said Cottle, as they sat down to eat, "and then maybe I'll show you one or two good things to shoot. Can any of you handle a rifle?"

"I can shoot some," replied Gus.

"I have often gone gunning in the woods back of Rockvale," replied Oliver; "but I never tried my hand at any big game."

"We had better leave the big game alone," laughed Cottle. "As I understand it we are not on a hunting tour, and it would take too much time."

"You are right," said Mr. Whyland with a smile; "we are after game of a different sort."

There was a general laugh, and then Gus observed, —

"But I would like to have a shy at a bear or something."

"Better leave bears alone," put in Cottle with a shudder. "I went after one once and it nearly cost me my life."

By the time the meal was finished the sun had set, and then it grew dark rapidly; while the dew became so heavy that Oliver wrapped a blanket about

him to keep out the cold, and they all gathered together under a big tree.

Cottle arranged a temporary tent by throwing a double blanket over one of the lower boughs of the tree. He said this would be ample shelter so long as it did not rain. Then some dry boughs were strewn upon the ground, and he invited all hands to turn in as soon as it pleased them to do so.

It may well be imagined that Oliver slept but little that night. The novelty of the situation, as well as the strange sounds around him, kept him awake until far into the small hours of the morning. He was the first up, and by the time Cottle and the others had their eyes open, he had the fire started and the water in place.

"I'm as stiff as a starched collar," groaned Gus as he arose; "if it's all the same, I'll sleep in a bed to-night."

"You won't see a bed for several weeks I'm afraid," laughed Mr. Whyland; "that is, unless you want to turn back."

"Turn back? Not much! I think this is a jolly good lark!" And that was the end of Gus's grumbling.

They were soon on their way. As Cottle had said, the road now became little more than a wagon-track, crossed and recrossed in many places.

"It is lucky Cottle is along," said Mr. Whyland to Oliver, as they dropped a bit behind. "We could never find the right track by ourselves. To me half a dozen appear to be the right ones."

"That is so," returned the boy. "It isn't like a city with a signboard at every corner. One could get completely lost without half trying."

"We must keep close together. I will warn your friend too. Should one or the other stray away, much time might be lost in coming together again."

The path was now up the side of quite a steep mountain. It was full of huge bowlders from around which the rain had long since washed all the sand and gravel. To one side grew small trees and thick bushes, while on the other was a steep incline, leading far below to a raging mountain torrent.

"Rather a dangerous place," observed the boy as he gazed down into the rushing waters; "if this mule should take a false step"—

"But they never do, as far as I ever heard," said Mr. Whyland. "They know the danger quite as well as the rider."

Instead of getting better the road grew worse, until Cottle stopped and allowed those in the rear to catch up.

"This path has been partly washed away since I was over it before," he said. "You want to be care-

ful. If it gets much worse, we will have to turn back and take another road that is better, but nearly twice as long."

"We will follow you," said Mr. Whyland. "We trust ourselves entirely in your hands."

After this they kept close together. The mules no longer stepped forward with ease. Each head was down, and every foothold was tested before the step was taken.

Narrower and narrower grew the path until it was scarcely two feet wide. Here the decline on the one side became little better than a precipice.

At last Cottle came to a halt.

"It is no use," said he; "we will have to take the other path around this mountain. Last week's storm has ruined this road for good. Can you turn around or back to that small turnout?" he asked of Oliver, who was in the rear.

"I'll try," replied the boy. "I guess I had better get off and lead Dobbins."

"Be careful," Mr. Whyland warned him.

"Yes, be careful," said Cottle; "that mule ain't the kindest critter in the world."

Throwing the reins on the animal's neck, Oliver essayed to slide to the ground. As he did so, Dobbins shied nervously to one side.

"Look out there!" yelled Cottle. "Catch him quick!"

THE NEXT INSTANT HIS BODY DISAPPEARED OVER THE EDGE!
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"Yes, yes! Catch him!" echoed Mr. Whyland, while Gus sat still, too terrorized to speak.

Oliver tried to catch the beast as bidden, but again Dobbins shied.

The movement threw the boy to the very edge of the path. He tried to save himself, but it was useless; and the next instant his body disappeared over the edge!

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN THE MOUNTAINS.

WITHOUT an instant's warning, Oliver Bright found himself in a situation that thrilled him with horror. As he went over the edge of the narrow path he did his best to save himself, but, as has been told, it was useless; the grass he clutched came out by the roots, and then he found himself going down and down, he knew not where.

He turned over and over as he rolled, and uttered several wild cries — cries that fairly pierced the heart of Gus, Mr. Whyland, and Cottle the guide, who could do nothing to save him.

The descent was fully sixty or seventy feet. Just before reaching the whirling torrent below, Oliver's body struck a projecting rock, and this encounter, rude as it was, undoubtedly saved his life.

This can be easily seen, when it is told that to have fallen into the river would have been instant death. The current would have dashed him directly on the rocks, and that would have ended all.

But when Oliver's body struck the rock that projected from the decline, the blow caused it to bound

several feet out of its course, and in doing this he was hurled directly into the branches of a short and stout fir-tree.

By this time consciousness had forsaken him, and his body hung among the branches, a limp, inanimate mass.

"My heavens! the boy will be killed!" cried Mr. Whyland, who was the first to recover from the awfulness of the situation.

"It's a bad tumble," replied Cottle, shaking his head.

As for Gus he could not say a word. Suppose Oliver was killed? The very thought sent shiver after shiver through his frame.

"We must hurry down to him somehow," went on Mr. Whyland; "how can it be done?"

"I think there is a path a little way ahead," replied the guide. "Come, we will dismount and see."

His directions were instantly followed. Sure enough, a little distance farther there was a break where a tiny watercourse led to the river below.

It did not take them long to reach the bottom of the ravine, and once down there they hurried back with all possible speed.

"He must have come down somewhere about here," said Cottle, as he came to a halt; "but I don't see anything of him."

"Oh, I hope he hasn't been carried down the river!" cried Gus; and he added in a low tone, "Poor Olly! if he is dead, oh, what will I do? It will break his father's heart!"

"I don't see —" began Mr. Whyland, and then, happening to glance up, he ejaculated, "here he is up in the tree!"

In a moment more Cottle had climbed the tree and had the body on the ground. He loosened Oliver's collar, and applied his ear to the boy's heart.

"Is he — is he alive?" faltered Gus.

"Oh, yes; but he has had a severe shaking up. Bring some water from the river."

Gus hurried off to do so. When he returned Oliver was just stirring. Mr. Whyland put some of the water on his face and hair.

Presently Oliver opened his eyes and sat up.

"Where am I?" he asked faintly. "What — what — oh, I remember now! I didn't go into the river, did I?"

"No, thank God, you did not," replied Mr. Whyland. "It was a most miraculous escape!"

"How do you feel?" asked Gus. "I hope there are no bones broken."

"I feel sore all over. Give me some of the water."

Cottle gave him a drink, and carefully noted its effect.

"Did it hurt when it went down?" he asked.

"No."

"Then that's all right. If you were injured internally you couldn't drink without having a pain. Better take it easy for a little while though."

"I'll have to," replied Oliver with a suppressed groan; "I'm too sore to move much. Where is my mule?"

"Up on the path with the others. I'll turn them back to the other trail. All hands take it easy for an hour or so till I get back."

In a moment more Cottle was gone. Gus and Mr. Whyland sat down beside Oliver, one on either side.

"I'm so glad, Olly," cried the stout youth. "When I saw you go over my heart jumped right into my mouth, just as if I was going myself. Crickety! but it was a nasty fall and no mistake!"

In half an hour Oliver arose slowly to his feet. As he had said, he ached in every joint, and his head, too, felt queer, but otherwise he was all right.

"But I never want another such tumble," he declared. "I shall never forget it if I live to be a hundred years old!"

At the specified time Cottle came back. He had succeeded in turning the mules, and had found a much better path a little to the northward.

"Then we might as well go on," said Oliver; "there is no use in wasting time here."

"Do you feel able to go on?" asked Gus.

"I think so. We can try it any way."

Mr. Whyland could not help but smile at the boy's determination.

"You have lots of backbone!" he declared. "Well, since you say so, we will go on; but if you find it hurts you, don't hesitate to speak." And up to the path above they went, and then back to where Cottle had left the mules.

Walking pained Oliver considerably, and he was glad enough when he could sink once more into his easy saddle. Then the guide went to the front, and the onward journey was resumed.

By two o'clock in the afternoon they had passed around the northern base of the mountain, and were entering a long and narrow valley. Before them loomed a long, low range of hills, and Cottle said that the Aurora mine was located just beyond, and about forty miles to the north-east.

The scenery upon all sides was magnificent, and had Oliver's mind been free from anxiety, and his body without pain, he would have enjoyed it to the fullest extent. Even as it was, he sometimes reined up his mule to drink in the prospect.

"Beats the East all to bits!" he said to Gus as they rode side by side.

"You are right. I would rather take a trip about here than go to Europe ten times over."

"And yet you will find thousands of people who prefer the latter trip," put in Mr. Whyland. "Some have gone to Europe half a dozen times and never come West once."

"I guess they go because it's the style," suggested Cottle. "But as for me, Uncle Sam's domain is good enough every time."

The riding was now much easier and all hands urged the mules to a better gait.

"If we can, we will make Billy Ford's cabin before we halt," said the guide.

"And who is Billy Ford?" asked Oliver.

"An old timer who keeps a sort of cross-roads store and tavern," laughed Cottle.

"A store! 'Way out here!" cried Gus. "Who in creation can he have for customers?"

"Miners come to him for forty miles around. Billy has been here since prospecting first began. We won't buy much from him because he is so terribly high in prices; but you had better patronize him a little, just to keep him in good humor."

On and on they went, until, just as the sun was setting over the mountain they had just passed, Cottle pointed to a cabin far ahead.

"There is Billy's," he said.

In a quarter of an hour they had reached the spot. It was where the road crossed a small mountain stream.

Ford's cabin proved to be a rude structure of logs plastered over with mud. A sign hung outside, stating that provisions and drinks were to be had on reasonable terms.

As they rode up, the proprietor came out, gun in hand. As soon as he saw Cottle, however, he lowered the weapon.

"Hello, Felix! Who you got thar?" he asked.

"A party bound for the mines, Billy," was the guide's reply; and he jumped down and held out his hand.

"So? All right." The two shook hands. "Going to squat here over night?"

"Reckon to, unless you say no."

"That's all right. Come in, gents," and Ford turned to the others. "Suppose Cottle's told you all about my ranch?"

"He told us something," said Oliver as he dismounted.

The party were soon on the ground, and Cottle turned to take care of the horses. As he did so, Ford walked up to him.

"Say, Felix, it's a wonder you didn't strike this place last night," he said with a laugh. "There might have been some fun if you had. Your old boss, Colonel Guerotaz, stopped here."

CHAPTER XXV.

A STORM IN THE MOUNTAINS.

OLIVER BRIGHT was as much surprised as Cottle to hear Ford's words. Colonel Mendix had stopped at the place only the night before! They were indeed close upon his heels.

Without replying, the guide turned an inquiring look towards the boy. Oliver at once spoke up.

"You say Colonel Guerotaz was here last night?"

"Yes," replied Ford. "Know the man?"

"I know of him. Was he alone?"

"No, no; had two new hands with him."

"Did they have any baggage? I mean heavy stuff?"

"Not as I know of. Are you off to see him?" went on the keeper of the store curiously.

"We are," replied Oliver. "What time did the colonel leave?"

"At sunrise this morning. Oh, he's a spry fellow, I can tell you."

Oliver said no more, but walked back to Mr. Whyland and Gus.

"Colonel Mendix is just a full day's journey ahead

of us," he said. "I wonder if it is likely that we catch up with him before we reach the mine."

"I don't believe that would be advisable," was Mr. Whyland's reply.

"Nor I," responded Gus. "I don't want to face the man until we reach the mine."

"We will tell Cottle of this. He can easily keep a lookout ahead."

As soon as the mules were cared for, the little party entered the store. It was a place scarcely twenty feet square, lit up in the daytime by three dirty windows and at night by a couple of smoky lamps.

The air was redolent of the aroma of various groceries, mixed with the smell of tobacco and liquor. Oliver remained about five minutes, and then went out and sat down on the little porch to catch his breath.

Behind the store there was one room, used by Ford as a dwelling. In this apartment all hands were invited to spend the night with the proprietor; but all, with the exception of Cottle, declined with thanks, Oliver saying that now they were in the mountains, they would prefer to sleep in the open.

"I couldn't sleep in that place if I was paid for it," he told Gus, when the three were alone.

"Nor I," replied the stout youth. "Crickety! the

smell was strong enough to walk! I don't see how Ford stands it."

"It is a matter of habit," laughed Mr. Whyland. "Just as the families of a wild tribe all live in one wretched hut. With so much pure air around, one would think they would want just that and nothing else, but the opposite is the fact."

However, not wishing to offend Ford, they had him furnish them with supper and breakfast, and before leaving, Mr. Whyland purchased from him a pound bag of tobacco for a dollar, which he afterwards presented to Cottle for use in his stump of a pipe.

Half an hour after sunrise on the following morning they bade the storekeeper good-by and were off. Each one was in the best of spirits, though Oliver was still sore from his frightful tumble.

The little stretch of plain before them was soon crossed. At its termination they came to a narrow defile, between a small mountain on one side, and some rugged rocks and bushes on the other.

"Were it not for these natural roadways the journey from one place to another would be next to impossible," said Mr. Whyland as they rode along.

"I believe you," said Oliver. "However would we be able to climb this mountain, small as it is? No mule could ascend such a steep place."

"Don't be too sure about that," put in Cottle; "it is wonderful what a mule can do when put to it. But such an undertaking breaks them all up."

At noon they found themselves still in the pass. Gus stated that he was growing tremendously hungry, but Cottle said they had better wait for dinner.

"We want to get out of this pass as soon as possible," he added; "in a couple of hours it won't be a safe place to be in."

"Why, what do you mean?" exclaimed Oliver.

"I see some bad looking clouds over there," replied the guide, pointing with his finger. "We are going to have a storm some time this afternoon."

"A storm!" cried Gus.

"Yes; and I won't be suprised if it is a heavy one."

"Then why not seek shelter somewhere here?" went on Gus. "I am sure we can keep dryer here than out in the open."

"Not much!" responded the guide. "If that storm is heavy this place will be a mighty dangerous one. Come, we must hurry along."

"And why dangerous?" asked Oliver as they urged the mules forward.

"On account of the rocks that roll down the mountain, and the wind. At times it is something fearful. We must lose no time. I was in a storm down

in the Gedney Pass one day in September two years ago, and I will never forget it. Hark!"

As Cottle concluded, a low rumble far to the northwest was heard, a rumble that seemed to rise and fall like the billows of the ocean.

"It's coming!" cried the guide. "Forward as fast as you can!"

His directions were followed instantly. The mules seemed to understand the situation and did their best.

On and on they went, the sky above them each instant getting blacker and the roll of thunder coming nearer. Then a puff of heavy wind swept past them.

"It is coming!" shouted the guide. "Hurry up, all of you." And away he went faster than ever.

Oliver and Gus were close behind. Mr. Whyland brought up the rear. Another rush of wind followed, and then it seemed to grow black as night.

"We are going to catch it and no mistake!" exclaimed Oliver. "I wish we were out in the open once more."

"Half a mile farther will fetch it," cried Cottle.

He could say no more, for at that instant a flash of lightening fairly blinded them. Then came a deafening roar of thunder that lasted fully five minutes, followed by a perfect deluge of rain.

Oliver pulled his hat far down over his head and

eyes, and buttoned his coat up tightly. But it was no use; in one minute he was soaked to the skin.

"Don't stop!" called out Cottle during a brief lull. "We must get out of here if we wish to save our lives!"

Nobody replied; but every one understood the importance of his words.

Oliver's mule was now getting winded, and the boy had great trouble in making him keep up the pace. He patted the animal and spoke encouragingly to him, but all to no purpose. In a moment more they had dropped behind.

"What is the trouble?" asked Mr. Whyland, slacking his pace.

"The mule won't go. He is winded, I guess."

"He must go. Keep him at it."

Another clap of thunder followed. The mule pranced about wildly. All the others had gone ahead, and Oliver was left alone to deal with the animal.

"Whoa!" he called out. "Whoa, Dobbins!"

But Dobbins would not stop his prancing. Another clap of thunder, and a mass of rocks came crashing down close to the spot where the mule stood.

In a twinkling his hind feet rose in the air, and his rider was unseated and thrown to the ground. Then Dobbins tore away, leaving Oliver to his fate.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE AURORA MINE AT LAST.

OLIVER now found himself in an exceedingly perilous position. The rain came down in such a torrent that he could not see five yards ahead, and what had become of his mule he did not know.

He picked himself up from the spot where he had been thrown, and crouched for a moment under an overhanging rock. As he did so, a blinding flash of lightning swept by, and on the instant a tall tree that stood not over two hundred feet away was split from the top to the bottom, and was wrapped in a blaze of fire!

The sight nearly made Oliver faint. The air was charged with a peculiar odor, — probably sulphur, — and the boy gasped for breath.

"Struck by lightning!" he muttered. "Thank Heaven I was not nearer!" It took him several moments to recover sufficiently to proceed on his way. Then he stumbled on and on, falling half a dozen times. And all the while the rain came down in sheets, until he thought a perfect deluge had overtaken him.

"I wonder where the others are?" he muttered. "No use to call; my voice couldn't be heard a dozen steps away in this wind."

Ten minutes passed. He had progressed probably the eighth of a mile. The stones of the road cut into his soaked boots, and made his feet pain as they never had before. He was all out of breath, and sat down under an overhanging rock.

"If this is life in the mountains I want none of it," was his thought. "If a rock should roll down upon me I would be crushed into a jelly."

He wished earnestly that he was once more with the others. What if he should miss them by the way? The thought made him shiver.

"I wouldn't be alone out here for a million dollars!" he cried aloud, and his voice sounded strange to himself. "I must hurry and catch up by some means."

As he concluded, a peculiar noise ahead made him start. What was it? Some wild animal?

He sincerely hoped not. His weapons were all upon the mule's back, and if attacked he would be next to defenseless.

The sound came from a bend above. For several seconds Oliver hesitated about proceeding.

And yet it had to be done. He must go ahead; there was no other way.

While hesitating, the sound was repeated. But this time it was louder and more capable of interpretation. In spite of himself the boy gave a low laugh.

"Dobbins!" he cried. And in a moment more he was around the bend.

True enough, there stood the mule, shivering and braying all to himself.

It did not take Oliver long to climb upon the animal's back, and once there he urged the beast on as before. Dobbins had had a short rest, and struck out well.

"Now to find the others. They cannot be so very far away. Get up, Dobbins, you rascal!"

In a few moments more the narrow pass came to an end and Oliver found himself upon an open plain. He tried to peer through the darkness and rain.

To the southward he thought he could discern three figures moving about. Were they his party?

"I ought to be sure before I move away," he told himself. "Suppose I fire a shot and see?"

No sooner had the thought entered his mind than he decided to act upon it. The sound of the report had hardly died away before an answering shot was wafted back to him.

"Thank goodness I have found them," he cried. And the next instant he was off at the top of Dobbins's speed.

Gus came out to meet him. Despite the rain the stout youth's face was covered with a broad smile.

"Crickety! but I'm glad you're here!" he called out. "I was afraid the storm would swallow you up."

"And it nearly did," replied Oliver; "I've had a narrow escape."

By the time they had reached the others the rain began to abate as rapidly as it had come on. The dark, angry clouds broke up in all directions, and presently a glint of sunshine appeared far in the west.

"Always act that way," said Cottle. "This is the blamedest region for such showers ever was."

All gathered around Oliver to hear what he had to say, and all agreed that his escape was miraculous.

"After this we must be more careful to keep together," said Mr. Whyland gravely. "He might have lost his life and none of us been the wiser. I did not miss you, Oliver, till we were out here."

"Nor did any of us," put in Cottle. "I tried to look back for you, but the rain was too thick; I couldn't see a thing."

In half an hour the sun was shining as brightly as ever. As the day was warm all hands took off their coats and hung them on their mules' backs to dry.

"We may as well make camp before any of us take cold," remarked Mr. Whyland; "it is only about an hour from sunset."

"There is a good spot just a quarter of a mile farther," said Cottle. "We will be there in five minutes."

Quarter of an hour later they were in camp. The tent was pitched on a bit of high, sandy ground, and a roaring fire was started just outside of the entrance. The following day was Sunday. Cottle would have gone ahead as usual; but the boys and Mr. Whyland voted to remain in camp and take a rest, and let the mules do the same.

"Besides," said Oliver, "nothing will ever be gained by breaking in on the Sabbath when there is no absolute necessity for so doing."

"You are right," said Gus.

"I like to hear young men talk like that," put in Mr. Whyland; "it shows a proper spirit. Let us spend the day as it should be spent."

"Not many men keep the day out here," remarked Cottle. "Many of them don't know what a Sunday is after they once leave the city."

The entire Sunday was a beautiful one. After breakfast Mr. Whyland read several chapters out of a Bible he had brought along, and offered prayer; and then they took a long walk about the neighborhood, leaving Cottle lying in the door of the tent smoking his pipe and watching the mules.

"As I have heard remarked, this is God's country,

and so in very truth it is," said Mr. Whyland. "Some day all these hills will be dotted with farm-houses and barns, and the sound of the thresher and reaper will be heard on every hand."

"It is a rich country," returned Oliver. "I would not wish for better farming lands than these."

"And yet all who come here do so only for gold and silver," put in Gus.

"It will not be so long. The people who mine must live, and somebody must raise the stuff for them to eat."

"In that direction lies the Aurora mine," went on Mr. Whyland, pointing with his finger to the south-east. "Cottle says we ought to reach it by Tuesday noon."

"Colonel Mendix has already arrived there, I suppose," said Oliver. "Won't he be surprised when we appear on the scene?"

"No doubt he will do all in his power to outwit us."

"But he shall not do it," said Oliver decidedly. And he meant it from the bottom of his heart.

Sunrise on Monday found them once more on the way. Riding was now much easier, and they made rapid progress, all traveling side by side.

That night they encamped near the edge of another mountain torrent. It was a beautiful spot, the prettiest they had yet stopped at.

"THERE IS THE CORTEZ MINE, AND JUST BELOW IT IS THE AURORA." Page 181.

Oliver sat on a flat rock, his chin in his hands. It was the last night's camp on that lone spot. What did the morrow hold in store?

All through the night he slept but little. Once Gus awoke and noticed it. Rolling over, he whispered, —

"Don't worry, old boy; it will be all right, mark my words."

"I trust so," replied Oliver. "I wish it was over."

He was the first to be stirring, and he cautioned Cottle to halt as soon as the mining district should appear in sight. Then in a short quarter of an hour they were off.

On and over the plain, five, ten, fifteen miles. Then they began slowly to ascend a steep but small mountain, halting at the top.

"There," said the guide, pointing to a spot not a quarter of a mile away, "there is the Cortez mine, and just below it is the Aurora!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

AN INTERESTING CONVERSATION.

THE Aurora mine had been reached at last!

Oliver Bright, as he sat on his mule, drew a long breath. His tedious journey had come to an end.

"The Aurora mine!" he repeated. "That way, beyond that row of buildings, is the Aurora mine?"

"It is the shaft leading to it," said Cottle. "It is a very peculiar mine, running, as it does, parallel to the mountain for some six hundred feet. I could never understand how Colonel Guerotaz, as he is called, could abandon it, seeing as it paid so well; but when he approached it from the extremity of the Cortez I began to smell a mouse, and what you have told me makes it as plain as day. He will be greatly surprised to see you." And the guide gave a long, low laugh.

"I have been thinking I had better go down alone," said Oliver. "He will know you, Mr. Whyland, and you too, Cottle."

"I have been thinking the same thing," replied the former. "But you had better take Gregory with

you, and if you get into any trouble fire off your pistol. You know what to say."

"Of course," replied Oliver; for he and Mr. Whyland had had too many conversations on the matter for him to make any mistake.

A little later Oliver and Gus rode forth from the bushes in which the confab had taken place, and headed directly for the group of buildings below.

"Hope you ain't nervous, Olly," said the stout youth, as they moved on at a rapid gait.

"I am anxious but not nervous," was the low reply. "This Colonel Mendix has grossly wronged my father, and I intend to have matters set straight."

"I'm feeling mighty funny myself—"

"If you want to go back—" began Oliver.

"Not a bit of it; not if I knew I was going to have my head taken off," cried Gus. "What, after all you did for me on the Polly Eliza! Not much!" and he spurted on ahead.

In a few minutes they had arrived at the row of buildings. Only a single man was in sight, the rest probably being at work.

"Is Colonel Men—I mean Colonel Guerotaz anywhere about?" asked Oliver.

The man stared at them.

"Reckon you'll find him over there in the office," was the slow answer. "Anything particklar?"

But Oliver did not reply. Riding over to the building indicated, he dismounted, followed by Gus, and rapped loudly upon the door.

"Come," said a sharp voice from the inside; and they entered.

It was a plain room, furnished with a desk, a small safe, and half a dozen chairs. In one corner lay a number of specimens of ore; and that was all.

In front of the desk sat Colonel Mendix, deep in the perusal of a number of written statements. He glanced up in surprise as the two entered. He had expected to see some of his own workmen.

"Hello! Who are you?" he exclaimed.

"Is this Colonel Guerotaz?" asked Oliver, advancing as calmly as he could, though his heart beat as it never had before.

"That's my name," was the short reply. "And you are?"

"A couple of mine-hunters all the way from San Francisco," returned Oliver. "This is my friend Mr Gregory. My name is Oliver."

The Spaniard bowed.

"I am pleased to meet you, Mr. Oliver," he said, falling into a natural mistake, as Oliver had intended he should. "You are looking for a mine?"

"Yes; a mine that was located a number of years ago."

"And what mine was that?"

"The Aurora."

The Spaniard turned pale, and clasped his hands together.

"I — I — know of no such mine around here," he faltered.

"Not at all?" asked Oliver sharply.

"No, no; I am quite sure. What makes you think there is a mine by that name near here?"

"I did not say it was near here, did I?" asked the boy innocently.

"Oh!" Colonel Mendix breathed a sigh of relief. "I thought — "

"But I am told it is quite near here," went on Oliver.

Colonel Mendix jumped to his feet.

"Who told you that?" he demanded.

"Mr. Arthur Bright."

"Arthur Bright! I don't know such a man."

"His son says you do."

"His son!" the man staggered back. "Where did you meet his son?"

"His son was in San Francisco about a week ago."

"I — I — did not know he had a son," faltered the colonel.

Oliver could not help but smile, the man was so confused.

"If you do not know the man it is not likely that you would know he had a son," he said.

Colonel Mendix jumped to his feet.

"I want none of your smart sayings, young man!" he said.

"And I haven't anything very smart to say," replied Oliver. "I only want to know the location of this Aurora mine."

"What do you want to know that for?"

"I want to find out about it for Mr. Bright."

"Did he send you?"

"No; but he could not come himself, and so I came for him. He said the mine was somewhere out here, and I promised to look it up."

Colonel Mendix looked at Oliver sharply for a moment."

"Who ran this mine?" he asked slowly.

"Colonel Mendix."

At the mention of that name the Spaniard could not help but flinch. But he quickly recovered.

"Ah, yes, I knew Colonel Mendix," he replied. "He went to South America several years ago."

"He did?"

"Yes. If you are after the mine he opened I can tell you all about it. But it is of small consequence, I can assure you."

"Why?"

"Because the mine is utterly worthless. Colonel Mendix had great hopes of it proving a bonanza and sunk a good deal of money in it. The investment made him a poor man."

"Was it all his own money he used?"

"I think he had some Eastern capitalists interested; but when he saw the mine was a failure he never tried to settle the matter; simply sold off the machinery to pay off the indebtedness, and cleared out."

"Have you heard from him since?"

"Never."

"And where is the mine? I would like to be able to tell Mr. Bright that I had seen it."

"It is about a quarter of a mile below here, and half-way up the mountain. Follow the wagon-track that leads to the south and you cannot miss it."

Of course Oliver knew that the man was telling a falsehood; yet he wished to hear all the colonel might have to say.

"And the claim is quite abandoned?" he asked.

"Entirely. It would not pay to reopen it under any consideration. This mine of mine, the Cortez, pays but poorly, and it is by far the best in the district."

"Thank you, we will take a look at the mine you speak of and then come back," said Oliver; and the two withdrew, leaving the Spaniard gazing after them earnestly.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

COLONEL MENDIX IS ASTONISHED.

"I BELIEVE that man would lie when the truth would do!" burst out Gus, when they had ridden out of hearing. "Of course you don't take any stock in what he says."

"No, indeed! Even if Cottle had not told us all about his little trick, I would never believe him after he had passed himself off as somebody else. We will ride on in the direction he indicated as far as he can see us, and then turn back to where we left Mr. Whyland."

This was done; and fifteen minutes later they had rejoined their friend and the guide.

"I was getting a little worried," said the former; "well, what luck?"

Oliver told him of what had occurred.

"The old fraud sent you off to the Johnny Brill mine!" burst in Cottle. "Brill opened it, and when it was nearly played out, turned it over to Mendix; why I never knew, excepting that the Spaniard wanted to palm it off as the Aurora."

"That was probably his scheme," said Mr. Why-

land. "He is a deep one. I wish I knew just where he keeps all of his papers."

"There was a safe in the place called the office," replied Oliver.

"Yes; but he may have some place in San Francisco —"

"Guess not," returned the guide. "I reckon you will find all you want right in that little building."

"If we could only get hold of them —"

"I'd ride in and take possession," continued Cottle. "If you have a right to the mine I wouldn't wait a minute."

"We have if it's the right mine," said Oliver.

"I can vouch for it that it is. I know every foot of the ground around here."

"Here is the description of the mine," said Oliver, producing the papers. "Listen, I will read them off;" and he did so.

"That's it to a T, and no mistake. The Cortez is only a blind to the regular mine. I'd swoop down on him." And the guide shook his head decidedly. He would have been better pleased if there had been a regular muss with a bit of shooting added.

"I wish I knew where the sheriff of the county was located," began Mr. Whyland.

"The sheriff is Dan Shattock," replied Cottle. "He lives over to Fennel Gulch."

"And how far is that from here?"

"About thirty-five or forty miles."

"If I gave you a letter to him could you bring him back with the necessary papers?"

"Certainly. Only Dan will want pay in advance."

"I will give you the hundred dollars that you have earned. You can pay him whatever is necessary, and I will pay you back with good interest. Come, I will write the letter without delay."

"Yes, do," said Oliver. "Colonel Mendix may smell a mouse and try to head us off ere long. He had not expected to be disturbed, but now you can rest assured he will be on his guard."

Mr. Whyland sat down immediately to compose the letter. It was not a very long epistle, but it was just to the point. Oliver read it over and offered several suggestions that the other deemed valuable, and then the letter was folded and placed in Cottle's hand.

"I'll be off at once," said the guide; and he mounted his mule.

"And how long before you will be back?" asked Oliver.

"Depends on where I catch Dan Shattock. Not longer than three days, I reckon." And with these final words Cottle rode away.

"I trust he will be lucky enough to find his man

at once," said Mr. Whyland. "Having the sheriff here will be a great help to us."

"I suppose Gus and I had better ride back to carry out the deception," said Oliver. "Mendix will be looking for us."

"And I will remain in camp down here in the hollow," said Mr. Whyland. "I think as long as the colonel does not see me we will be safe. But if you need me, fire off a shot as before agreed."

A moment later Oliver and Gus were on the return. They followed the track they had come by, and in less than half an hour had passed the abandoned mine, and were once more at the Cortez's office.

"Well, are you satisfied now?" asked the colonel as he came out to meet them.

"That mine is certainly abandoned," replied Oliver, raising a light laugh, far, however, from natural.

"Yes; it is utterly worthless." Colonel Mendix paused. "Was that all you were hunting in this region?"

Oliver hesitated for a moment, not knowing exactly what to say in return.

"It was all we wanted to know about the mine," he answered slowly. "But you tell me that mining around here doesn't pay?"

"Hardly. It did years ago, but we have nearly reached the end."

"If you have no objection I would like to take a look around your mine," said Oliver. "I was never in a mine just like this." He did not deem it necessary to say that he had never been in a mine of any kind. "It must be an interesting sight."

Colonel Mendix frowned slightly. The idea of these two suspicious young men prowling about the place did not suit him.

"It is not such an amusing sight," he replied with a short laugh.

"Still you don't object, I suppose," said Oliver.

"Oh, no; I — I — will send for a man to show you through. It is not often we have visitors away out here. Take seats while I send for the man."

He indicated a couple of chairs, and the two boys seated themselves. Oliver's heart beat like a trip-hammer. What would be the result of this strange visit to the mine?

"Have you good stout boots?" went on Colonel Mendix; "you need them in a place like this."

"Oh, we always wear tough sole-leather," laughed Gus. "We have been knocking about too long to do otherwise."

This reply put the colonel off the track once more. But he went on, —

"You are from the West then?"

"We came from Central America," replied Oliver;

"but we have been spending some time in San Francisco."

"Ah, I see."

There was a short pause after this. Oliver felt the colonel's sharp eyes bent full upon him, and to avoid confusion he bent over and began an examination of the sole of one of his boots.

"That is getting a little worn," he said to Gus; "I guess I will pare that edge off with a knife." And getting out his penknife he began to do so.

While at work several men came into the office and asked for instructions. Oliver became much interested in what was said, referring as it did to the transfer of some heavy machinery from San Francisco to the mine. He laid down his knife, pulled up his boot, and drank in every word.

From this he learned that on the day following a party of six men with eighteen mules were to start for the coast. On arriving there, the machinery was to be put up in packs, loaded on the mules, and then brought to the mine. The trip would occupy the best part of a month.

This conversation gave the boy considerable satisfaction. It would decrease the force of men in the mine by six, and this would count for much if the sheriff should have any trouble in establishing their claim. He trusted that Colonel Mendix would not discover their intentions before the start was made.

When the men were about to leave, the colonel motioned for one of them to remain.

"Here, Restrepo, I want you to show these two young men through the mine," he said. And then followed some instructions in Spanish to the effect that the trip should be a short one and nothing of importance should be shown.

"*Si, signor*," replied the fellow, touching his cap.

"This man will show you through," said the colonel, turning to the two; and there was nothing left to do but to follow the man out; and this they did.

No sooner were they gone and the door closed, than the colonel sank back in his chair in deep thought.

"That Oliver's face reminds me strongly of one that I have seen before," he muttered to himself. "I do not like the manner of either of them. Bah! I must be getting nervous. What can two boys do?"

He was about to turn again to the papers before him, when his eyes rested upon the penknife Oliver had left lying on the floor. Half abstractedly he picked it up.

"Oliver Bright!" he ejaculated, as he read that name upon the handle. "That boy must be Arthur Bright's son! Ah, I see it all! He is spying upon me!" He clinched his hands. "I must attend to this at once!" he cried.

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN THE AURORA MINE.

THE guide that Colonel Mendix had furnished the two boys was a tall, swarthy Spaniard of sinister aspect. He had been in the colonel's employ for many years, and was his favorite tool upon all occasions.

"Follow me, please you," he said brokenly; "we go down quick."

He led the way from the office across a strip of yard piled high with crushed ore and dismantled machinery of old-fashioned pattern, and at length they came to the opening of the mine, directly into the side of the mountain.

"It must be dark in there," said Gus as they passed the threshold.

"Not dark, many lamps," said Restrepo. "Come, close by me, please you." And leaving the pure light of day behind they entered the passageway.

For the instant the boys could see nothing. But gradually their eyes became accustomed to the gloom, and then they distinguished far ahead a number of flames flickering like so many yellow stars in a dark sky.

"This is the first lode," said the Spaniard. "Pay good many year ago; not much now."

"And how many others are they?" asked Oliver eagerly.

The man hesitated. He had been cautioned not to say too much.

"Only few," he replied evasively. "I show, please you." And on they went.

They had nearly reached the lights when a man, carrying a lantern, came running towards them.

"Back!" he cried. "Half a minute! Back!"

"What is the matter?" exclaimed Gus in sudden terror.

"Fire blast," answered Restrepo. He turned and motioned them back.

They lost no time in returning to the entrance. A few seconds later a dull roar was heard, followed by the sound of falling rocks.

"All right now," said the Spaniard; "no more for an hour."

"I wouldn't want to be around when any of these blasts go off," shuddered Gus. "Might kill a fellow without half trying."

"You are right," replied Oliver. "Ever kill any one?" he asked of Restrepo.

"Killed two last year," was the grim reply. "But their fault, no other. They not run away far; stand

close; blast go off; both get heads blowed away, please you."

"Horrible!" cried Oliver. And he made a mental vow that should he ever become master of the mine he would take extra precautions against such tragedies occurring.

"I suppose some men get so reckless they don't value their lives," remarked Gus. "Mr. Whyland was —"

Oliver gave him a sharp pinch in the arm. "Take care what you say!" he whispered.

In an instant Gus understood the slip he had made.

"Oh!" He drew a deep breath. "Mr. *Ryder* told me they don't seem to care whether they live or not."

Oliver was relieved to hear his friend turn the slip he had made.

"Well, Mr. *Ryder* ought to know," he replied. "But I should think every man's life would be sweet to him," he went on.

"And so it is," broke in a voice behind them.

Both boys started. Turning, they beheld Colonel Mendix close at hand.

"I thought I would come down and show you through myself," he said blandly; "it is not often that I have visitors, and I think it my duty to show you

all the points of interest. Restrepo. you may go to work again." And he added some words in Spanish to the man, who departed at once.

Oliver could not help but feel uncomfortable. Why this sudden change in the colonel's manner? Did he suspect anything?

Then he began to wonder if Colonel Mendix had overheard the slip Gus had made. He sincerely hoped not. It might prove the cause of trouble.

But the colonel appeared to suspect nothing. He led the way, chatting gayly, pointing out this object and that in the most natural manner, until both boys were completely disarmed.

"Never seen a mine like this before?" he said. "Well, it is a sight well worth a good many miles of travel. Of course to us it is a very humdrum business, blasting and crushing day in and day out."

"And do you never leave the mine?" asked Oliver.

"Very seldom. Once in a while I take a trip to 'Frisco on business, but that is all. I have no family ties, and this life here suits me just as well as any other."

Before the boys were aware an hour had slipped by. Colonel Mendix led them into a number of abandoned passages, and they did not see the miners quit work for the day and leave the mine.

"Now, if you can do a little climbing, I will show you the richest lode in the mine," said the colonel at length, when he was sure they were left alone.

"I guess I can climb anywhere you can," replied Oliver with a laugh; "and I can help my friend along."

"Perhaps you had better stay behind," suggested Colonel Mendix to Gus.

"No, no, I'll go wherever he does," cried the stout youth.

A look of disappointment crossed the Spaniard's face.

"Very well then. Follow me." And he led the way up a narrow passage, and through a small hole into a rough sort of chamber.

"We can only get to it this way," he said. "To leave it one must take a different route."

"How is that?" asked Oliver.

"Because to reach it this way one must drop down a distance of fifteen feet, and it is too much of a job getting back. But the other way the return is very easy, though rather long. Here is the place to drop, over these rocks. Do you think you can do it?" And he held the lantern over the edge.

"I guess I can," replied Oliver; "but — but — "

"But what?" asked the colonel sharply.

Oliver did not know what to reply.

"Here, I will hold the lantern for you," continued Colonel Mendix. "You go over first and I will follow, and we will catch your friend."

This seemed fair enough, and getting down, Oliver swung himself over the ledge and dropped.

About ten feet below his feet struck some slanting projection; but it was too slippery with water to catch a footing, and he went down fully fifteen feet farther.

"Hello!" he cried. "I—"

"Now you," cried the colonel to Gus. And before the latter could say a word he found himself pushed to the brink and sent rolling over. He clutched the edge with his hands, but was unable to draw himself up, and went over just as Oliver had done.

"What do you mean?" he demanded. "You pushed me over!"

"It is a trap," whispered Oliver, helping Gus to his feet. "Are you coming down?" he called to the man above.

"I don't think I shall," was the mocking reply. "That is one of the worst pits in the mine, and if I once got in I am afraid I would never get out again."

"You don't mean—" began Oliver, with his heart in his throat.

Colonel Mendix gave a loud laugh.

"I mean, Oliver Bright, that I have found you out," he replied. "You thought you were smart, but you are not smart enough to outwit me. You are completely in my power. It may be that you do not realize it just at present, but you will, later on, never fear. You cannot get the best of me as easily as you may imagine."

CHAPTER XXX.

A PERILOUS SITUATION.

OLIVER BRIGHT was never so taken aback as when he found himself and Gus Gregory in a deep pit in the Aurora mine, and in Colonel Mendix's power.

The turn of affairs was so unexpected that for a moment he could not utter a word. The villainous colonel had found him out, and what the result would be no one could conjecture.

"American boys are not always so smart as they think themselves," continued the Spaniard, as he seated himself upon the ledge above and looked down upon the two.

"What do you intend to do?" asked Oliver.

"That is my business," was the cold answer. "First, however, I want to ask you a few questions."

"Maybe we won't answer them," returned Gus sharply. He ached all over from the tumble he had had.

"You had better," was the pointed reply. "Both of you are completely in my power; I hold your very lives in my hands."

Oliver could not help but shudder. As for Gus, he gave a half-suppressed groan.

"First, I want to know who sent you out here?" went on Colonel Mendix. "Was it Arthur Bright?"

Oliver was silent.

"Did you hear my question?"

"I did."

"And why didn't you answer?"

"I shall say nothing until you help us out of this pit and conduct us back to your office," was the boy's determined reply.

"What! do you defy me?"

"I do. You have no right to treat us in this fashion."

"Ha, ha! right! Might is right out here. You must answer my question."

"And I refuse to do so."

"Think well. I am not a man to be trifled with."

"I don't need to think it over. I shall not answer a single question till we are back in your office."

"Then you will tell me everything?"

"Perhaps I will."

"I would not trust you. I think I had better leave you here."

"Leave us here!" cried Gus in terror.

"Exactly. Leave you here to the darkness and the rats." Colonel Mendix gave a cold laugh. "Oh, I can tell you the rats are nice companions, especially when they crawl all over you and nip you in the legs."

Gus gave a shiver. The idea of a rat attacking him!

"Perhaps *you* would like to tell something," went on the colonel.

"Don't you do it," put in Oliver.

"Not much," replied Gus. "If you don't say anything, you can depend upon it neither will I."

"Come, what do you say?" went on the Spaniard impatiently.

"I refer you to my friend," said Gus. "He is the only one to do the talking for this crowd. Your threats don't frighten me for a cent," he added boastfully, more to keep up his courage than aught else.

"And you would rather be left here to starve to death?"

Neither of the boys replied.

"Very well then," said the colonel, rising; "I will leave you to yourselves for the night. Perhaps in the morning you will have a different story to tell."

"You are going to leave us here?" asked Oliver.

"Yes; unless you tell all I want to know."

"I will tell nothing."

"Then good-night to you. There is no use trying to escape. Even if you manage to get up here again, I shall take pains to close the passage in such a way that you cannot get out." And, with another loud laugh, Colonel Mendix took up his lantern and disappeared, leaving the two boys in total darkness.

"Crickety, but we are in a pretty mess and no mistake!" said Gus, as the last ray of light left them.

"You are right; but don't let us despair," returned Oliver. "I think I did what was right; but it is rough on you."

"Don't mind me," said Gus. "I owe you a good deal. The question is, what is best to be done?"

"Listen!"

They did so. Far in the distance they could hear the echo of Colonel Mendix's footsteps, and the moving of several stones, and then all became silent.

"Do you think he spoke the truth about the rats?" asked Gus with a shudder.

"I don't know, Gus; there may be rats here. But he evidently wanted to frighten us all he could."

"Ugh! it makes me shiver to think of them. I wish we had a light."

"I have some matches. I will strike one and see what kind of a place this is."

"Hold on till I tear some pages out of my note-book and make lighters out of them. We want to save our matches."

"That's so."

Gus soon had the lighters made. Then Oliver struck a match, and they gazed about them.

The place into which the Spaniard had led them

was a veritable pit, some thirty or forty feet in diameter. On all sides the walls rose to the height of twenty feet or more — steep walls, which caused Oliver to shake his head sadly as he gazed at them.

"Pretty tough job to climb them," he said; "but perhaps it can be done."

"It will *have* to be done. You do not intend to stay down in this confounded hole?"

"Not a minute longer than I have to. Remember, Mr. Whyland will grow anxious if we do not return in a reasonable time."

"Colonel Mendix puts me in mind of a snake. His eyes are so cold and calculating they make me shiver every time I look at them."

"Now if we only had a lamp," said Oliver.

"But we haven't."

"I wonder if we could get this piece of wood to burn," went on the other, holding a stick he had picked up.

"You might, if you split up the end. Here, let me do it with my knife."

As Gus spoke Oliver felt in his pocket for his knife.

"My knife is gone!" he exclaimed. "I left it in the colonel's office when I fixed the sole of my boot."

"Didn't it have your name on?"

"Why, of course! I see it all now! Colonel Mendix had an easy job finding out who I was! What a fool I was to leave the knife lying there!"

"Never mind; it can't be helped now, Olly, so let us make the best of it. Here, I have the stick ready."

Gus handed back the stick. Oliver lit another match and applied it to the split end. It was rather damp, but at last caught fire.

"There! that is better than nothing!" declared the stout youth. "It is bad enough to be down here, without being in the dark. Now let us look around and see what the chances for escape are."

Oliver did not reply. He was looking at a name that was cut on the stick. The name was JAMES BARR.

CHAPTER XXXI.

SEEKING DELIVERANCE.

As will doubtless be remembered, James Barr was the name of the surveyor who had been sent by Mr. Bright to assist Colonel Mendix in locating the Aurora mine.

Oliver's surprise can therefore be imagined when he saw this same individual's name cut in the stick his friend had picked up to be used as a firebrand.

"James Barr!" he cried. "It must be the same. How wonderful!"

"What are you talking about?" asked Gus.

Oliver told him.

"And he is reported to have lost his life in a flooding of the mine," he concluded.

"It is strange," said Gus; "but still it counts for nothing. Barr might have cut his name on that stick in a moment of idleness."

"Of course; but it shows that he was here. And if that is so it is pretty good proof that this is the Aurora mine."

"That is so. I did not think of that. I thought that was all settled before."

"There is nothing like being doubly sure. But come, let us see if we cannot find some means of escape while the stick lasts. When that is gone we will be in darkness, for I see no more wood about."

Holding the stick up sideways, so that it would burn and light the way, the two advanced on a tour of discovery.

It soon came to an end. On all sides were the same perpendicular rocks.

"Not much encouragement there," remarked Oliver grimly. "But we must find some way out. Here, hold the torch, while I see if I cannot scale this side."

Gus took the extended torch, and Oliver made a desperate leap forward.

He gained a hold, and arrived three-quarters of the way up. Then he slipped, and rolled down to his friend's feet.

"Not that time," he cried; "but I think I can do it."

Again he tried, and again the same result.

"This clumsy coat and the heavy boots bother me," he declared. "I will take them off."

"How am I to get up, even if you do?" asked Gus dolefully.

"One thing at a time, Gus. Here, take the things. One, two, three!"

With a mighty spring Oliver made the jump. Half way up he paused. Was he going to fail again? No; he clung fast, reached up overhead, and drew himself up into the gloom.

"All right!" he called back. "Throw me the stick and then perhaps I can help you up."

Gus flung the firebrand as best he could. Oliver caught it and stuck it in a crevice.

"Now make the jump up the rocks and catch my hand," he called down, and he leaned as far as possible over the edge.

Gus did so. Three times he failed. The fourth, Oliver caught his wrist, and a moment later, puffing and blowing, both stood on the edge of the pit, but on the side opposite to that where they had entered.

"Crickety! I don't want to try any more such jumps!" panted Gus. "I'll be out of wind for a month."

"And I trust we don't get into any more such holes," laughed Oliver. "But the thing of it is, have we bettered ourselves by the movement?"

"That we can't tell till we see where this passage leads to," returned the other, pointing to a narrow opening in the rocks. "If that is only a blind we are as bad off as we ever were."

"I think that if I were down here alone I would go mad," said Oliver.

"I am sure I would. Heou! let us get out as soon as we can!"

Taking up the light, they proceeded down the narrow passage. It was a low cavern, so low that in many spots even Gus, the shorter of the two, was compelled to stoop.

"Hold on," cried Oliver who was in advance; "here is a stream of water. We don't want to be drowned!"

"Indeed not! Is it deep?"

Oliver made an examination th his hands.

"Quite deep. But here is a spot that is not very broad. I can jump it easily, and I guess you can do the same."

Holding out the firebrand, he made the leap, and landed safely upon the other side.

"Now you," he called to Gus; and in a moment they were together again.

It was not long before they entered what appeared to be a large chamber. Here, from some place far above, streamed in a faint light.

"Hurrah!" cried Oliver. "There is open daylight at last! If it was not for the fact that the sun has set it would be lighter still. Come, let us go on."

But they could not do so. On the opposite side of the chamber, if such it might be called, could be seen nothing but the solid rocks.

"Blocked!" cried Gus in dismay, and Oliver echoed the cry. "What shall we do now? Go back?"

"No, no! I think—" Oliver sprang aside and pointed to a corner. "Oh, Gus, what is that?"

The stout youth looked towards the spot indicated, and turned pale. And small wonder; for there, lying on its back, was the skeleton of a human being.

Both of the boys approached it slowly. It was the first time they had seen so ghastly an object, and it filled them with awe.

"Some poor miner that wandered in here and could not get out," said Gus. "See, nothing but his bones remain to tell the tale!"

"And if he wandered in here and could not find any way out, what are we to do?" asked Oliver in almost a whisper, so horrible was the thought.

"Don't—don't say that!" cried Gus; "my nerves are already unstrung. We must do what we can, and do it quickly too; for it will soon be night and then morning, and if we don't find anything to eat—" And he finished with a groan.

Oliver put his hand to his brow. What should they do next? Which way should they turn?

CHAPTER XXXII.

A VALUABLE FIND.

As Oliver stood thinking, a bright object lying upon the ground attracted his attention. He picked it up. It proved to be a silver match-box.

"Hello! here is something!" he said, and turned it over in his hands. Upon one side were the initals J. B.

"This must have belonged to James Barr also," he went on. "I wonder if that skeleton —"

He did not finish. Gus shook his head.

"It looks that way," he said. "Open the box and see if there is anything in it."

Oliver did so, and brought forth several pages that had been torn from a diary.

"Here is something," he said. "Hold the light so that I can see what it is."

With trembling hands he unfolded the sheets and scanned them over. He had hardly read a dozen lines before he gave a loud cry.

"Oh, what shame, what baseness!" he cried. "This is the dying statement of James Barr, in which he says that Colonel Mendix has enticed him

hither and made him a prisoner; that he is dying with a fever, caught some time before, and that the colonel wished to get him out of the way for fear he may expose the fact that the Cortez mine lies wholly within the Aurora mine limits; and that Colonel Mendix, *alias* Guerotaz, is in reality a Spanish counterfeiter named Guito!"

Oliver was both pained and delighted over the discovery he had made,— pained that James Barr had come to so heartless a death, and delighted to know that he now had the means within his power to cause Colonel Mendix's immediate arrest, providing, of course, he could gain his own liberty.

"What a rascal that Spaniard is!" he exclaimed. "Just think of his luring poor Barr to his death while the man was sick with the fever! I would like nothing better than to give the brute a sound thrashing, and he deserves a thousand!"

"Never fear but what the law will take care of him," replied Gus. "They are not letting counterfeiters off so easily, to say nothing of Barr's death, and this mine swindle."

"If we were only out of this hole!"

"That's just it. But gracious, I don't know how to turn!"

"Let us go back to that watercourse," suggested Oliver after a moment's thought. "That must lead somewhere."

"You are right. I never thought of that; but if there is escape that way, I wonder why Barr didn't —"

"He was probably too sick with the fever," said Oliver, partly to keep his own courage up. "Come on. *Nil desperandum!*"

In a few minutes they were back at the water-course. Here they found a narrow passage, scarcely a foot in height, leading upwards.

"Shall we try it?" he asked.

"Certainly. Try anything."

So Oliver crawled into the hole on his hands and knees, and Gus followed. They had not gone far before they found the rock giving way in many places to dirt.

"I take that for a good sign," said Oliver. "I think we are near the top of the hill, but how far from the opening I cannot tell."

For ten minutes more they continued on their painful journey. Then Oliver came to a halt.

"Nothing but rock ahead," he said.

Both he and Gus were ready to cry with vexation. Had they taken all this trouble in vain?

"Are you sure?"

"That is all I can see. Wait till I dig over it where there is a bit of dirt."

Oliver went to digging vigorously. But with his

bare hands it was slow work, and he was about to give up in despair, when suddenly his hand struck an opening beyond.

"There is a passage!" he exclaimed. "Wait till I enlarge the opening."

He worked away for fully quarter of an hour more. Then he squeezed his way through and helped the stout youth to do the same.

"This is better!" remarked Gus, when they found themselves in a much larger passage on the other side of the opening. "Now let us hurry; the stick shows signs of going out."

There was no need of urging; Oliver was traveling at the height of his speed. Up and up they went, the passage growing wider as they advanced.

"Hold up," cried Oliver, suddenly stopping short. Then he put the firebrand behind him and peered ahead. "Hurrah! I see the light of evening shining into the other end of this passage. We are out of it at last!"

And such proved to be a fact; for five minutes later they emerged, and found themselves at the very top of the mountain, at a spot where they could look down upon the mine buildings.

"Thank God we are out of that hole!" cried Oliver. "Oh, how good it seems to be in the open air once more!"

"Won't that Spaniard be taken aback when he learns that we have escaped," said Gus. "He was so positive he had outwitted you!"

"We must find our way back to camp at once. Mr. Whyland will be getting anxious concerning us."

"You are right. Let's see, I think the spot is in that direction."

"So do I, just beyond the three tall trees."

A minute later, after a whiff of fresh air, they struck out for the camp. They had hardly appeared in sight when Mr. Whyland came running out to meet them.

"You have been gone longer than I expected!" he exclaimed. "Where are your mules?"

"We have got a long story to tell," said Oliver and Gus in a breath. And sitting down beside the sheltered fire Mr. Whyland had started, they related their adventures.

Of course the gentleman was much astonished.

"It sounds almost too strange to be true," he said. "Let me see that statement that was left by James Barr. No doubt it will prove of the utmost importance to us."

He took the leaves, and by the light of the blazing fire read them aloud. All hands listened with rapt attention.

They contained but little more than what Oliver had intimated, saving the telling of where much of

the proof of Colonel Mendix's villainy could be found, — in San Francisco, and in a number of places in Brazil.

"I guess we have *him* in *our* power now," said Mr. Whyland when the reading was finished. "If only Cottle was here, we might go ahead."

"I think we can afford to wait a day," laughed Oliver, he felt so relieved to be safe in camp once more. "Colonel Mendix still thinks we are in the mine pit."

"That is so. If he saw you now he would think you were a ghost."

"I would like to play ghost on him and scare him into a fit," said Gus. "He deserves it."

"He will get more than a ghost scare when we get after him," observed Oliver sternly. "He will find out that leaving us there to perish is no light offense."

"I cannot understand how I was so blind to his real character when I went into the mine deal with him," put in Mr. Whyland.

"That proves he is a born actor as well as rascal," said Oliver.

"I can't help but feel sorry for that James Barr," observed Gus. "I suppose he trusted Mendix just as much as anybody did."

"Undoubtedly," rejoined Oliver. "If he had stood

in with the Spaniard, it isn't likely he would have been left to die in that horrible fashion."

"I presume you two lads are pretty well fagged out," said Mr. Whyland a few minutes later. "You had better turn in and try to get a good sleep."

"Fagged out don't express it," yawned Gus. "I am half asleep all over, as the saying goes."

"You'll be stiff enough in the morning, I'll warrant," laughed the gentleman. "You are not accustomed to such climbing as you had to do in the mine."

"No." Gus shuddered. "My, but it was awful! I didn't dare to think of not getting out for fear my hair would turn white!"

"I can realize now the horror of a cave-in in a coal-mine," put in Oliver. "It's one of the most dreadful things that can happen to any one."

"You are right, my lad," said Mr. Whyland. "But come, there is no use to dwell upon what you have gone through. Try to forget it, and give your mind and body a chance to recuperate."

"Well, I'm going to try it, anyway," grumbled Gus, as he prepared to retire. "If I get a nightmare, just poke me in the ribs somebody."

"We will!" laughed Oliver.

"You see, I don't want to go through it again, even in my sleep."

After this there was quite a bit more of talking, and finally they retired, to rest, if not to sleep.

On the following morning as they were getting breakfast, they were surprised to see a horseman approaching from the direction of the mine.

"Who can it be?" questioned every one.

"Perhaps it's the colonel," said Oliver. "Suppose you hide, Mr. Whyland, and let only Gus and I meet him."

"A good idea."

The gentleman stepped behind some rocks. As he did so the horseman came nearer, and they saw that it was indeed Colonel Mendix.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

BROUGHT TO BOOK.

"GOOD-MORNING, Colonel," began Oliver as they went forth to meet their visitor, though with pistol in hand.

The Spaniard nearly fell from his horse.

"What, you!" he shrieked. "You!"

"Yes, Colonel Mendix, I and my friend, as you see. You did not have us quite so much in your power as you thought."

"How — how did you escape?" faltered the Spaniard.

"That is our business."

The man's brow darkened.

"What do you want here, any way?" he demanded. "You have no right to hang around my mine."

"Your mine? You mean my father's mine."

"Bah! Not so. Your father's mine is abandoned."

"My father's mine is here, and in full operation. The Cortez and the Aurora mines are one and the same."

"Who says so?"

"Felix Cottle for one—"

"His word is worth nothing. He is—"

"He tells the truth."

"Right you are," said a voice from behind; and turning, the two beheld the guide, who had just ridden up.

"Back already?" exclaimed Oliver.

"Yes; and all O. K.," replied Cottle with a knowing wink. "Collared my man on the fly."

"Cottle!" cried Colonel Mendix, changing color.

"Yes; just in time to see you get your deserts," with a short, dry laugh. "Reckon we are square now, Colonel."

"What do you mean?"

"That there young man will tell you, him and Mr. Whyland."

"Whyland!" The colonel was deadly pale now. "Is he—"

"Yes, he is here," said a calm voice; and the gentleman stepped forward. "Colonel Mendix, when we parted in the East years ago, I guess you did not expect that we would meet some day out here."

The Spaniard bit his lips. He was trembling with fear.

"I—I—what do you want?" he faltered.

"We want our rights," replied Oliver.

"There is nothing here for you."

"I think there is," returned Mr. Whyland. "Mr. Shattock!" he called out, and a tall, sharp-eyed stranger rode from under cover.

"The sheriff of the county!" muttered Colonel Mendix, and on the instant his backbone seemed to desert him.

It was an exciting moment for all. To Oliver Bright it was a time of triumph. The termination of his quest was at hand, full of the promise of success.

As for Colonel Mendix, it took the Spaniard several seconds to recover from the shock he experienced when the sheriff appeared upon the scene. He saw at once that matters had taken a most serious turn.

"Well, Colonel Guerotaz, this appears to be a grave business you have been engaged in," said the sheriff, as he dismounted from his horse and strode over to where the Spaniard sat.

"I do not know what you are talking about," replied Colonel Mendix as stiffly as he could.

"You don't?"

"No, sir."

"Well, it is simply this: That you have done everything in your power to defraud Mr. Whyland here and one Arthur Bright out of their lawful share

in a certain mining scheme connected with the Aurora mine —"

"Not so," cried the colonel. "The Aurora mine is one of no value, just as represented to them."

"They are willing to swear otherwise, at least Mr. Whyland is, and Felix Cottle is willing to testify — "

"I don't care. I have my rights. My word is as good as — "

"And there is other proof," put in Oliver. "James Barr — "

Colonel Mendix jumped up as if shot.

"James Barr! James Barr is dead."

"We know that. And we also know how he came to his death."

The Spaniard started.

"But his dying statement remains —"

"His dying statement? Why, he was drowned in the mine — "

"No, not drowned, but made a prisoner while suffering from fever," replied Oliver. "And when you shut us up in the pit in the mine we came across his skeleton, and near it found a statement in a match-box for safe-keeping."

"It is false."

"It is the truth. That statement is now in Mr. Whyland's possession. Perhaps he will read it to you."

"That is not necessary," said that gentleman. "I will put the statement in Sheriff Shattock's hands. It is enough to say that it proves our claim to what is known as the Cortez mine, as well as the Aurora, and also that Colonel Guerotaz, *alias* Mendix, is in reality a noted counterfeiter named Guito."

At the last words a shrill cry burst from the Spaniard's lips. The revelation had been so unexpected that it completely unnerved him.

"You — you — " he began.

"You had better not say much," suggested the sheriff. "It may all count against you at the trial." He walked over and put his hand upon Colonel Mendix's knee. "You are my prisoner."

"Your prisoner!"

"Exactly. You will please dismount at once."

"This is an outrage — "

"Come, say no more. There are others who suspect you, and I have heard before that you were supposed to be an escaped criminal."

"I will not submit. I will — "

"You will submit," replied the sheriff firmly. "Here, hold out your hands — Hello! Stop him!" For Colonel Mendix had on the instant wheeled around his horse, and was galloping off at the top of the animal's speed.

"Catch me, if you can!" he cried mockingly. "Catch Cirilo Guito if you are able!"

And away went horse and rider like a whirlwind.

"Well, by thunder!" ejaculated Felix Cottle; "he's going to try to sneak!"

"After him!" shouted the sheriff. "Come on, all of you!"

"We're with you!" responded Cottle. "He must not be allowed to reach those hills yonder. If he does, it will be like looking for that pin in the haystack, and worse."

Off went the sheriff and the guide, with Mr. Whyland not far behind them.

Oliver and Gus stared at each other. What should they do?

"Come, Gus," cried the former. "The more the better in a case of this kind."

And he started for his animal, tethered but a short distance away.

"But the camp"—began the stout youth.

"Must take care of itself. There is no one about to rob us, anyway. Come."

Gus needed no second urging. Indeed, he would not have remained behind alone under any consideration.

It took some time to put their animals in proper condition for use. By the time they had mounted, the crowd ahead were just disappearing over the brow of a low hill.

Side by side, the two boys urged their animals along at top speed. Oliver had his weapons ready for use, but trusted he would not be called upon to use them.

Crack! The sharp sound of a rifle broke the stillness. They rightfully guessed that the sheriff had fired on the fugitive, but whether he had reached his mark or not they could not tell. They continued to move forward with eyes and ears painfully on the alert.

The top of the hill gained, they could see Mr. Whyland and the others climbing a rocky slope over to the westward. Near the top of the slope, among some scanty brush, the boys could see Colonel Mendix, astride of his horse, urging the animal along with hand and spur.

Oliver could have fired at the man with ease, but the thought of bloodshed held him back. He wished to capture the Spaniard as much as did any of the others, but he would not run the risk of having the rascal's blood on his conscience.

As Oliver and Gus began the ascent of the rocky slope Colonel Mendix appeared at the extreme top. For a single instant he looked back and shook his fist at his pursuers.

Again the sheriff fired, and so did Felix Cottle; and this time the fleeing criminal was wounded in

the leg. He gave a shrill cry of pain, sent back two shots in return, both of which flew wide of their mark and disappeared.

"He is gone!" gasped Oliver.

"Don't you think they will get him?" queried Gus.

"I don't see how they can; the woods over yonder are so thick. But come, we may as well follow the others;" this as the stout youth began to lag behind.

"I'm so stiff, from yesterday," groaned Gus. But, nevertheless, he urged his horse on, and they steadily decreased the distance between themselves and Mr. Whyland and the others.

From the way the sheriff headed, it was evident he thought Colonel Mendix was trying to ride in a circle. Sheriff Shattock's words soon proved this.

"This Mendix, as you call him," he said, "is trying to get back to the mine. No doubt he wishes to clean out the office-safe before leaving this section of the country."

"Then would it not be better if one of us went back toward the mine?" suggested Mr. Whyland.

"I reckon it would be."

"I'll go to the mine if you say so," put in Felix Cottle. "I'm better acquainted around the place than any of you."

"All right; go," said the sheriff; and at once the guide turned back on the trail.

He soon came upon the boys, to whom he explained the situation. Gus wanted to return with him, but Oliver was for following Mr. Whyland; and so they went on, leaving Felix Cottle to ride on to the Aurora mine alone.

"If we hurry we can catch up with Mr. Whyland," said Oliver. "Come, Gus; remember the chase is not likely to last long."

"I'll do my best!" cried the stout youth. "Look-out, Oliver!" he went on suddenly.

He dropped down on his horse's back, and instinctively Oliver did the same. There were two reports, and a clipping through the leaves of the trees followed.

"My gracious, he's firing on us!" gasped Gus. "We must try to keep out of sight." And he shuddered so greatly that he almost fell from his saddle.

"To the left — where the bushes are thicker!" exclaimed Oliver.

He led the way; and hanging low behind his horse's neck, Gus followed. Soon they were once again well screened.

In the meanwhile the shots fired by Colonel Mendix had served one good purpose. The sheriff had lost sight of the rascal; but now the reports helped the officer of the law to locate him, and he struck off on a side trail, with Mr. Whyland close at his heels.

The ground was rocky and uneven and full of loose

stones, and the horses made but poor headway. But in this matter they were no worse off than was Colonel Mendix, and both were satisfied that they were making just as good progress as the man they were pursuing.

Five minutes later Oliver and Gus joined Mr. Whyland and the sheriff. They came through a belt of timber and found the two men on the defensive.

"Hullo, it's the boys!" cried Mr. Whyland. "Have you seen anything of Mendix?" he went on anxiously.

"He is over to the left, in the clump of pines," responded Oliver. "But be careful. Did you not hear him fire on us? The bullets whistled right over our heads!"

"We heard the shots," said the sheriff. "The pines, eh? Then he is making for the mine without a doubt."

"Is there no way of heading him off?" asked Mr. Whyland.

"I believe there is — down at the mountain torrent some distance below here. But no time is to be wasted."

Without further words they rode on through some low brush and over a rocky plain. While on the latter spot, all hands kept a sharp lookout for stray shots; but none came. Clearly Colonel Mendix had passed down along the watercourse, just as the sheriff had surmised.

"Wait!"

The sheriff uttered the word in a low tone, as he halted on the very edge of a large, overhanging rock.

The others drew up behind him.

Leaping to the ground, Sheriff Shattock moved cautiously to the front, and peered over.

"What do you see?" whispered Oliver.

"Nothing, as yet; but wait. If I am right, he will come along the road, just below here."

"And if he does?" put in Mr. Whyland.

"I reckon I'll make him come to terms," was the slow but determined response.

A minute — and another — passed. To the boys they seemed hours.

Suddenly the sheriff leaped up.

"Halt!" he shouted, and aimed his pistol downward. "Halt!"

Looking over the edge of the rock, the others saw Colonel Mendix riding along a narrow path beside the watercourse.

At the sound of the sheriff's voice the Spaniard looked quickly around, but he did not slacken his animal's speed.

"Did you hear?" demanded Sheriff Shattock. "Halt! I have a dead aim on you."

At this Colonel Mendix uttered a loud cry to

his horse, and away bound the animal on a swift gallop.

The sheriff fired, and the sound of the shot, echoing and re-echoing through the cañon, frightened the animal below. He leaped to one side; and in a trice horse and rider were in the mountain stream, and being borne along by the swift current.

"Just my miserable luck!" muttered the sheriff. "See, he knows enough to duck under, and thus avoid another shot!"

"What is best to do now?" asked Oliver anxiously.

"We must go down to the slope below here and try to head him off. Quick! there is not a moment to lose!"

Again the sheriff went on, with the three others stringing after him in single file. The flat rock was passed, and once more they found themselves among the loose stones and short, thorny bushes. The sheriff was the best rider of the party, and he soon drew ahead. Gus was the worst laggard, and he begged Oliver not to leave him alone.

"This bit of the country may be full of snakes and wild beasts," said the stout youth. "And I don't want to face anything like that all alone."

"I don't doubt but what there are both snakes and wild beasts here," returned Oliver. "But I doubt if they molest us if we leave them alone."

"But suppose a big mountain lion should leap out after us" —

"Oh, pshaw! Even that wouldn't be any worse than having Colonel Mendix use us for targets."

"That's true too!" Gus gave a groan. "It's a pity he can't drown himself in that river! It would be a good job done."

"Such rascals don't pass out of existence so easily, Gus. But come, we really must hurry along. If we don't, we'll miss Mr. Whyland and the sheriff altogether. And I must confess I haven't the least idea where we are or in what direction our camp lies."

"Nor I. Well, I'll do my best."

The thought that they would be left behind and become lost did more to urge Gus ahead than anything else. They proceeded over the rocks on a fairly brisk trot; and when the slope leading down to the mountain stream was reached Mr. Whyland and the sheriff were but a hundred yards in advance.

The edge of the stream was hidden by an irregular growth of bushes, so it was impossible to see what was beyond until these were parted. The sheriff, finding a shallow spot, made his horse wade out into the open.

"There he is!"

"Where?"

"Over on the opposite side! He is just crawling up the bank behind a clump of overhanging trees!"

The sheriff pointed with his finger, and Mr. Whyland and the boys, who were just coming up, saw that he was right.

"Where is his horse?"

"Already on shore. Come; there is but one thing to do now," went on Sheriff Shattock.

"What is that?" asked the three others simultaneously.

"We must ford the stream."

"Can we do that?" asked Oliver.

"Yes. Just below here it widens out and is not over a foot and a half deep. I will show you the spot. And we will be certain to head off our quarry, for he cannot turn back on that side."

Without giving Colonel Mendix time to discover them they drew back behind the bushes and followed the sheriff's lead along the watercourse. In less than five minutes they came to the spot he had mentioned. Here the stream was three times its natural width and one could have almost leaped from rock to rock without wetting a foot.

The horses went over readily enough, although they were dry, and longed to drink. But they could not stop to humor the beasts. They reached the the opposite shore and drew up behind a convenient bowlder.

A clatter of hoofs was heard, and an instant later Colonel Mendix dashed past on his horse, rider and animal leaving a stream of wet behind them.

"Stop!" commanded the sheriff again. "You can't escape us now!"

The Spaniard muttered something in his native tongue, and went on faster than ever, with the others in hot pursuit.

"He intends to escape if he can," said Gus. He was completely fagged out and ready to drop from his saddle.

"Come on!"

It was the cry of the sheriff as he made after Colonel Mendix, riding as he had never ridden before. He was warmed up to the chase, and meant to end it in a very few minutes.

The way was a treacherous one, and the rascal ahead was compelled shortly to slow up. Soon the sheriff was again within hailing distance.

"Stop, or I'll fire!" he commanded.

The Spaniard turned. He held a pistol in his hand and pointed it at Sheriff Shattock's head.

Before he could pull the trigger, the officer fired his own weapon. The shot struck Colonel Mendix's horse, and the animal leaped into the air and fell down, throwing the Spaniard over his head.

When they drew near, they saw that in falling

the Spaniard had struck his head upon a sharp rock, and that the blood was flowing profusely from a wound in his temple. He was unconscious, and it took fully ten minutes to bring him to his senses.

"I give up," he said in a faint voice. "The fates are against me, and I am in the hands of the law at last."

Shortly after, the whole party rode to the office of the Cortez mine. Here the safe was opened, and an examination of its contents proved all the statements made against Colonel Mendix to be true.

Sheriff Shattock at once took charge of the criminal. By the suggestion of Mr. Whyland he appointed Cottle as temporary superintendent of the mine until the law should have taken its course.

"The situation of affairs was fully explained to all the men at work, — some thirty in number. They were surprised; but as none of them had ever liked Mendix, they took the change in good part, especially after Mr. Whyland told them that they should every one be well rewarded if they remained true to their duty.

Then Oliver and Mr. Whyland sat down to figure out the probable value of the mine. It was a tedious, but highly gratifying task.

"One hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars!" gasped Oliver, as he surveyed the figures. "Can it be possible?"

"It is," laughed the gentleman. "Your father will be a rich man."

"What welcome news it will be to him! This mine was our last hope. Had it failed us we would have been thrown upon the world without a dollar. But I am glad for your sake also, for you did so much towards getting our rights."

"Not half as much as you, my boy. The real credit is wholly yours."

On the following day, after all necessary preparations were made, Oliver and Gus departed with the sheriff and the prisoner on the return. At Ford's store the sheriff left them, but the two boys had no difficulty in following the trail back to Sacramento.

"Now for the first train home!" said Oliver. "Father must hear the good news without delay."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CONCLUSION.

"Too bad! I thought there would surely be some word from Oliver to-day."

It was Mr. Bright who spoke. He sat in an invalid chair on the side porch, propped up by soft pillows. Donald, the man of all work, had just returned from the post-office with the information that there were no letters.

Mr. Bright was getting well rapidly, but the lines of care were plainly to be seen upon his brow. He started up with a deep sigh.

"Nearly two weeks since I received any word," he murmured to himself. "How slowly the time drags! Can it be possible that he was too hopeful and that the Aurora has proved worthless after all?"

He passed his hand over his brow.

"If that is so what is to become of us? I am getting too old to work, and he has no trade to which he can turn his hand."

As he concluded, the latch on the gate was lifted, and, looking up, the sick man saw Dr. Tangus enter the yard, and walk up the gravel path.

"Good-morning, Mr. Bright," he said stiffly.

"Good-morning, doctor," was the low reply. "Take a seat on the bench. I am sorry there is not a chair here."

"This will do very well." The learned man paused for a moment. "How are you feeling?" he asked.

"Much better, thank you. Another week and I think I will be all right."

"I am glad to hear it. I suppose you know the purpose of my visit to-day."

"You are after the payment of that money."

"Yes. You know it was due yesterday."

"I know it was. But cannot you wait a few days longer? I am expecting word from my son by every mail or by telegraph."

"Concerning that mining scheme you mentioned?"

"Yes."

Dr. Tangus tossed his head.

"I don't believe that amounts to much," he said. "You are altogether too sanguine about it."

"My son Oliver — "

"That boy isn't as smart as you think he is. His going off on a wild-goose chase — "

"It was no wild-goose chase, doctor."

"I think it was. But, of course, that is none of my business. All I ask is that you pay the money due."

"I cannot do that just at present."

"Then I will have to put the case in my lawyer's hands —"

"At once?"

"At once."

Mr. Bright felt a deep pang shoot through his heart. His pecuniary difficulties were to be dragged before the public at last.

"Well, if you must," he began slowly. Then he stopped short and half rose from his chair. That figure hurrying so swiftly down the road towards the house seemed strangely familiar. Was it — could it be — "Oliver!" he cried out, "Oliver, my boy!"

"Yes, father, home again!" was the glad response; and a moment later father and son were in each other's arms.

"I did not write or telegraph because I wanted to surprise you," said the boy. "How do you feel?" And then, noticing Dr. Tangus, "Excuse me, Doctor, I did not see you before. How do you do?" and he held out his hand.

Dr. Tangus took it coldly.

"So you are back from your wild trip," he remarked.

"Yes, sir; and glad of it."

"Dr. Tangus has just called for his money," put in Mr. Bright. "He says he must be paid at once

or he will go to law. Tell me the worst, my boy."

"There is no worst to tell," replied Oliver. "Dr. Tangus shall be paid whenever he wishes the money. The Aurora mine has been located, and is to-day worth one hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars."

"Oliver!"

"It is true, father, every word of it. Here are the papers to prove the fact." And the boy drew from his pocket a large envelope and handed it over.

"And your father owns an interest in this mine?" asked Dr. Tangus. He felt mighty cheap.

"My father owns five-eighths of it. Of the other three-eighths, one part belongs to the estate of one James Barr, and the other two to Mr. Whyland of Boston, who has very kindly loaned us his check for three thousand dollars to help my father out of his difficulties;" and Oliver passed the check over for inspection.

"Seems straight enough," grunted the doctor. "I will call again to-morrow. I have no more time to spare to-day;" and catching up his hat, he left without another word.

"Oliver, you have saved us from ruin!" cried Mr. Bright with tears in his eyes. "But for you it would have gone hard indeed with us."

"I am glad the search has ended so well," said

the boy; "glad for your sake, and glad for my own."

. . . . . .

Several years have passed. Oliver is now at college, and has for a room-mate Gus Gregory, who is as stout and as full of good-humor as ever.

The Aurora mine is in active operation, managed by competent and trustworthy men. James Barr's interest was purchased by Mr. Whyland, and the money went to support the surveyor's aged mother, his only known relative.

The Spaniard, known to the reader as Colonel Mendix, is now in prison, suffering the full penalty of the law. Let us trust that when he comes forth once more it will be with the determination to lead a better life in the future.

Mr. Bright still lives at his old home, surrounded with all the ease and comfort that money can procure. Of Oliver he never tires of talking.

"One boy in a thousand," he says. "Thank God for giving me such a son in my old age!"

And with these words let us say good-by.

THE END.

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